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Portrait drawing of the Author by Felix Topolski

LINES WRITTEN
TO AN INDIAN AIR

Essays

Mulk Raj Anand



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M. R. A.

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PREFATORY NOTE

All the essays collected together in the present volume were planned according to a scheme which I outlined for myself after I had finished writing a confession of my faith in humanism in a little book entitled *Apology for Heroism*, published by Lindsay Drummond in 1947. I wanted to work out the implications of the philosophy I had been developing in that volume and my other writings, in a number of essays on the moot points of the Indian renaissance. Therefore, although most of the material was originally published in the form of articles in various magazines, or broadcast on the B.B.C. and All-India Radio, or delivered by way of lectures, I have deliberately tried to preserve a certain continuity of attitude and feeling in all the essays. This will be apparent enough to anyone who reads them at all carefully, though some people may only like to read them as a series of notes on the position of literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, theatre, cinema, radio, education, women and the youth of our country.

But it is important, at this stage of the cultural development in India, that the reader should bring to this volume more than the merely casual perfunctoriness with which popular surveys of the arts are usually read or the academic precision with which scholarly tomes are perused. Because, this is neither a tourist's guide to the culture of India, nor the proverbial professorial dissertation on our heritage. From the fact that the essays appeared at different times, it partakes of the nature of a miscellany, but they may have a little more significance because they had originally been strung together in my mind in a fairly compact design. For, I wanted to depart sufficiently from the conventional treatise, both popular survey and thesis, and bring a kind of unbuttoned imaginative ease to some aspects of the creative life of our country, such as might enable me to inform the whole discussion from the point of view of the ordinary needs and interests of human beings. And, throughout, I wanted to pose the questions: Where are we going? How are we to develop our arts and literatures? How are we to reform our education system and redefine the status of our women so that we may learn to live more beautifully and intensely in the future? In short, I was

concerned to try and define a new sense of values, such as may supply the minimum basis for a dignified and healthy existence for our peoples in the 'free' India: or, if I may put it in another way, I wanted to discover what the content of our newly-won 'freedom' is going to be—the mere label of independence or the emergence in our midst of that richness and subtlety in the domain of knowledge and the arts which may give deeper meaning to our lives?

An attempt like this at revaluation is bound to be tentative. But I would like this tentativeness to be considered the chief merit of this book, if it has any. For it is likely that, in posing a number of questions, and in suggesting fresh possible angles for looking at our creative impulses, one may do better service than by giving expositions of the elements of our culture by merely boasting about our achievements. The basic facts and the general background of our culture are, I believe, by now more or less familiar through the work of the pioneer scholars, critics and interpreters. What needs to be done, perhaps, apart from furnishing the facts unknown to a previous generation, is to shift the emphasis from the chauvinism that our political slavery, and the undue weight given to various conventional idealisms, has encouraged, to a more modern and more imaginative appreciation of the impulses behind our arts and letters.

Apart from this there will be obvious in the book a shrill insistence on the desire to put man in the centre of all discussion, and to urge love and respect for him, and to demand the fulfilment of his basic needs in life. I offer no apologies or explanations for that shrillness, because I am convinced that what is going on in India is not only a renaissance and a social revolution, but a reformation, and that a secular state and a humanist culture alone can recreate a new spirit in our country.

I have been encouraged in my attempt to discuss and define new values for India by many Indian and European friends. I have acknowledged my debt to some of them at the top of the particular essay in the shaping of which they were immediately or remotely concerned. To those who remain anonymous I make this public avowal of my gratitude for help and friendship.

PROLEGOMENA TO A NEW HUMANISM.

To E. M. Forster

I suppose that there are few people in the world today who will deny that the era into which we have been born, this epoch of the first half of the twentieth century, has been fraught with the most terrible cataclysms. We seem to have been living on the edge of a volcano, believing it to have been exhausted long ago, and happy for short periods to see the rich fertile earth that spread before us, only to be shocked out of our complacency by the gathering smoke on the horizon, the deep rumblings of the earth and the periodic violent eruptions. And, children of crisis that we are, we stared like helpless victims at the lava that flowed about us, made our individual escapes and settled down unheeding. Except that, after the first world war, while a great many people still looked on, or merely analysed the disruption, proposing partial cures for famine, unemployment, disease, drought, civil war and war, some of us began to make a choice, to believe in a sustained effort to control nature and to direct men's minds, to help to build a new creative civilisation—or at least to hope for a new and just world. For we felt that all the resources of science and knowledge, amassed up to our twentieth century in the various parts of the world were at hand, and an age of plenty seemed within the bounds of possibility.

And this feeling about the possibilities and potentialities of the new world was a continuous feeling, running through the minds of certain layers of men from one end of the globe to the other; especially in the minds of those who took a cosmopolitan view of culture. For, through the two prolonged and bloody wars fought in a generation, as well as through the various undeclared wars which punctuated the interim period, the world has been, to a great extent, physically and psychologically destroyed. And there were some parts of the world, called backward areas, which had already been laid bare through exploitation by the great powers and had never been built up at all. In such a world, a world littered with the debris of vast ruins, there have been a few islands of resistance, men of a forward tendency, who have been seeking to restore sanity by the development of a philosophy vaguely called humanism.

Although the feeling for a new humanism is a universal one, I believe that it has a slightly different meaning for various individuals, since they spring from the background of different countries and have in view the local needs and interests of the peoples of those countries. So that the kind of humanism in which I believe, the kind of world I hope for, though not basically different from that which is the dream of my European contemporaries, is yet integral to the Indian tradition in which I grew up. Similarly, a Chinese or Russian intellectual of my generation is likely to find his conception of the new humanism coloured by the bent of his own temperament, in so far as it is the result of his upbringing in a different social climate.

But what precisely do I mean by the new humanism? What is the kind of world I hope for?

I suppose everyone knows that rather tame picture of Hope sitting blindfold on the top of the globe, with a harp in her hand. I feel very much like a child of that blindfolded Fate in talking about 'the world I hope for.' Because, as the English proverb says, 'if wishes were horses, beggars could ride.' Still, as a writer I live mostly by my dreams, by trying to know what life is like to most people to-day and by imagining what it could be like for them to-morrow. And, the world of my dreams is not very different from the world desired by most people. Therefore, even though I know that ideals always recede before actual realisation, and though I have no sanction to my hoped for new world, I shall put down here my tallest hopes and my most nebulous wishes. And, since these are my hopes and wishes, I may be forgiven if I relate them to the background of my life, from which they spring.

My childhood, boyhood and youth were passed in a comparatively poor home in the cantonments of India and in a small lane in Amritsar. My father came from a family of silver and copper-smiths, but, not having been apprenticed to the craft, he went to school and, after matriculating, joined the army. Though he was an intelligent and fairly well-read man and took great interest in the education of his children, he was more concerned that we should pass examinations and secure good government jobs than that we should grow up to be wise, simple, sincere and disinterested

workers in the service of truth and humanity. While my mother worshipped her idols vaguely, my father merely paid lip service to religion. Therefore, I grew up in a small world, materially poor, spiritually confined and limited, a world whose narrow boundaries were only trespassed by my own inordinate curiosity.

The education I received at school and college was a spurious, imitative, fruitless grounding, mainly through a foreign language, in useless and completely unconnected bits of history, geography, mathematics and the elements of science. I got not an iota of knowledge of India's past culture through all this schooling, and very little genuine appreciation of European culture. And up to the time that I issued out of the university no teacher had ever seriously asked me to face up to the questions: 'Who am I? What does this or that subject, economics or logic, really mean to me? And how do I really feel about this big broad universe into which I am graduating.'

For there was no connection between the learning imparted to me and the actual world of human needs and interests—the world in which, apart from a few snobbish, rich and prosperous people, everyone was frustrated, tormented and restless, and continually weeping over his suffering, a world harrowed by bloodshed and war, a world in which millions of illiterate, poor, undernourished, badly housed, ill clad men and women lived from hand to mouth, in cities that were like running sores, in villages which were like putrid cesspools.

When, during my adolescence, a scholarship enabled me to travel abroad to study philosophy, I soon realised how superficial was my grasp of myself and of the world about me. I realised that not only in India but elsewhere, only a privileged minority of people were free and the rest were merely living in a fear haunted universe, lacking the confidence to assert themselves or to express their desires, with little faith in the future and a shaky, tottering belief in old faiths, slaves to superstition or propaganda. I saw also that if the narrow, parochial world of India was going through a period of disintegration and anarchy, the various countries of Europe, too, were in the throes of violent crises and conflicts. Though enjoying a comparatively higher standard of living than India, the Western world jealously

preserved its national boundaries and was, in fact, more intensely torn between the luxury and ostentation of the few and the degrading poverty and fear of the many. All the wonderful human values of the Renaissance had broken down, all the arts and sciences, which had liberated the spirit of man and built up European civilisation, were rotting in the hands of specialists scrupulously concerned with their own bits of knowledge and unable to synthesise the whole of experience and stop the rot. Nothing seemed more certain in this waste land than that the towers of London, Vienna and Paris were about to fall.

That abounding early curiosity of mine, which had led me to desire beauty, and which had goaded me to the study of the human mind, now forced me also to try to understand the causes of world chaos. I travelled a great deal and, in the course of my search, began to write about the suffering men and women I had known, to find out the reasons for their heart-rending failure to live happy lives, and to learn for myself what were the things and ideals I could honestly believe in, and to help to remould the tragic world in which I had grown up into a less harassed world.

It was obvious to me that the old world was dead and gone and only lingered in the minds of the sentimentalists who always dote on the past. And the old humanism, of which this old world was the product, was a spent force. It had served its function very well. Through the insistence on humanism of the writers of the seventeenth century, the emphasis had been shifted from a theological view of the world to a human interpretation. It had come to be recognised that man is largely responsible for what happens to him on earth; and that, therefore, it is necessary for him to acquire knowledge in such a way as to better his physical and psychical existence. Since knowledge was mainly the achievement of reason, this humanism was associated with the rediscovery of the ideals of the classical Greek and Latin literatures. And the qualities which were to help men to correct the mistakes of the past, which were the qualities of a humanist, were spiritual insight, flexibility of mind, clear thought and clear expression. This humanism served its time very well. A great deal of the scientific progress of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe was the result of this view of life. And it gave men the belief in their capacity to mould themselves

and the universe they had inherited. But having fulfilled its function, having released the scientific spirit of adventure which informed so much of Greek and Latin literatures in hitherto uncharted worlds, this old humanism lapsed; science was to advance so rapidly and so far that it left human feeling and the respect for man and concern for his primary needs and interests behind. The individual was disrupted by the commercialism which resulted through the industrial revolution that science had helped to perfect. And the ordinary human values, love, justice, beauty were consequently perverted or destroyed.

That a great many people are dimly aware of this breakdown is obvious from the contrary feelings that they express about this harassed twentieth century: on the one hand they denounce it as a period of barbarism, on the other hand they prefer the forms, ideas and sentiments of this very twentieth century to those of any other. Witness the universal popularity of Mr. Well's novels and social tracts and of Mr. Shaw's plays and prefaces. The works of these authors deal with actualities and are pregnant with suggestions about the future. And I suspect that it is this love of actuality among thoughtful people that makes them read contemporary novels. For, however good and bad they may be, these novels have come to be a repository of such wisdom about the heart and the head as is available in the uncertain and precarious age of transition in which we live. The time when people used to go for guidance to the church on Sundays is over, because, instead, they now go to the movies or to the pub. The authority of the parent has withered. The Guru is no longer sought for by the vast majority. The poet is too difficult and far removed from the public. The psychoanalyst is too expensive. The novelist, with his informal and unbuttoned approach to life, is only too easily available at the library. And, even though mostly escapist and deliberately perverted to suit the ends of commercialism, he is at least contemporary in feeling. So that his popularity is explicable. Certainly, literature, music and art are better able to fulfil the needs of our time than religion, and beauty is better worth worshipping than God or a Deity for whom the sanctions lie in the intuitions of a few mystics. For in art the creative imagination of man transforms the abstractions, justice, love, hatred, evil etc. by passing them through the experi-

ence of the individual. So that the ideas of the sermon become facts, the wisdom of the discourse is filtered through the subtle moods of real human beings and the censorious taboos become, in the arts, revelations of the causes of relapse and maladjustment in conduct. The emphasis is shifted from moral injunction to psychological understanding. And a deeper, more integral, conception of life is built up; a new kind of light is thrown on human behaviour, an illumination which is the most potent weapon of the new humanism.

The whole urge of my own writing came from this love of art as an illuminating factor in human experience and of poetry as a medium through which one can think humanly. Thus I feel that the sanction of poetic truth is the highest in our contemporary world. For in no age has the evolution of the individual in all his fullness, of the free mind, seemed so possible and so necessary as in ours. And as an artist is pre-eminently concerned with the attempt to make himself and other people into individuals, the truth he reveals becomes paramount. Specially is this so, because the artist cannot liberate the human mind, unless he is constantly discovering fresh aspects of life, new and original points of view, unless he is constantly revealing all the unapprehended variations of the human temperament, unless he is arresting the shades and nuances of the atmosphere in which we live and reorientating life with his own intense vision of experience.

I feel that, in this sense, art is knowledge as much as science is knowledge, and that the two aspects of truth are complementary, except that the orbit of art is more inclusive and subtle. For, whereas the discovery of the laws of heat, sound, electricity, and the study of phenomena for its own sake, may have a value for a few disinterested men, they only become really valuable when they begin to interest ordinary people, either by being revealed to them as poetical truths (and not merely as mathematical formulas), or by being made useful to them.

I believe that the compensatory character of art and science will be understood more easily if the supreme truth is reasserted—that man is as important as material, that all knowledge, whether it is realised by exploring the individual's experience of phenomena as in art, or in the laboratory through science, is in

the interests of the human race. Furthermore, the synthesis between these two forms of endeavour can only be attempted if we recognise that man, whom we exalt for worship, does not live in isolation but in and through society, in community with other men, whose needs alone generally bring about every advance of knowledge, and to whose interests, therefore, they must be primarily dedicated. For instance, if research in the cosmic ray, or in the manufacture of the atom-bomb, is at the moment independent of human considerations, then it is high time that its anti-human character be exposed and that it be harnessed to the extension of man's power over nature. In fact, what is necessary, at this juncture, is for us to discover human sympathies wide enough to embrace the whole world and founded on an enlightened conscience.

From what I have said above, it may be possible for the reader to see that by humanism I do not mean anything more or less than what it has always meant, illumination or enlightenment in the interests of man, true to his highest nature and his noblest vision.

A view like this arises from my rejection of the doctrine of two opposite worlds, the one natural and the other spiritual. The dualism of matter and spirit, which arose through the conflict of Christianity with the mechanical materialism of the 19th century, seems to me a superficial, conversational heresy that cannot today be held with any degree of consistency. For the reduction of the world to its ultimate constituents reveals that it is neither material nor spiritual, but an evolutionary universe, which has progressed from inorganic matter to organic life and which only assumes significance from the emergence of the many-sided faculties of man, that is to say from his human character. In this one, human, world the idea of a supernatural origin has survived only as a metaphor, a figure of speech of the early bards. Thus the categories, spiritual and material, are strictly redundant. And it follows that for me there is no escape into another world, but the need to make the best of this very world of ours, to deepen our experience of it through poetry and art, to explore its possibilities for beauty and joy and perfection and to create life, and a better and higher life, in the human community on earth.

If what I have said opens me to the charge that I am a rank materialist, I shall not deny it, and if my love of beauty opens me to the criticism that the means of attaining it in art are rather precarious, I suggest that I prefer the two-way traffic which the practice of art involves, that is to say the exchange between the artist and his audience, to the one-way traffic of the mystic which only leads to 'God', a quest from which few travellers return.

This humanism demands, then, the cultivation of the heart and the brain, and the intensification of the sensibility and imagination rather than the mystical test or the search for the eternity behind phenomena and the love of infinities. To me it seems that the poet's mind is constantly evolving poetic images which may sum up all the hidden impulses of man in the Universe, which may give expression to all the torments of the soul better than the language which uses the conventional phrases 'release' and 'salvation.'

I consider that consciousness, the world of faculty and experience, with which we acquire deeper and intense knowledge, understanding and illumination, is always engaged in the attempt to restore order and harmony in the universe. And in the attempt thus to live, in this struggle to achieve the balance between ever deepening awareness and the flux of the world, seems to me to lie the whole tension of human life and the struggle for values.

As the values evolved through this tension are human values, they are the fundamental ideals by which society lives; though, as society grows and changes and decays (or flourishes), the character of these values changes or is redefined.

The redefinition is a kind of reorientation or adaptation, or synthesis achieved through understanding rather than by the imposition of will, in the Neitzschian sense of that word. For the will, conceived as an absolute power, capable of transforming the world to its satisfaction, leads either to wilful egotism, which corrupts man and society, or it paves the way towards transcendental egotism through the self-disgust, lassitude and discouragement that arises in the face of awkward realities and through building up views of the tragic nature of destiny, of super realities which often symbolise death, despair and pure

nothingness. There is the need, in view of these aberrations, for encouraging psychological understanding as against moral condemnation or metaphysical evasion. And it is important to shift the emphasis from sublimation of self in personal ecstasy to the kind of questioning which makes one constantly search for balance between the inner and outer and thus enables one to be hospitable to life on all its levels, from the most exalted lyrical experience to the most degraded human conditions.

And, in the present context of wholesale world derangement and disorientation, when we all seem precariously balanced between life and the threat of violent death, this humanism becomes a crucible through which all knowledge and awareness passes and from which fundamental values are extracted by which we live in the workaday world.

I believe today, therefore, that only this new humanism can restore order and decency in our world, a faith which, since all the peoples need bread, air, water, freedom and soul, can bring these values to them, a faith which can bring a new idea of reverence to the least worthy of men, as men, and which can make us look at every endeavour in the light of men's needs and interests.

This is the kind of humanism in which I have come to believe, the kind of illumination from the point of view of man that I wish for, the kind of world I hope for.

Let me summarise these beliefs and these hopes by way of a programme for myself and for others:

- (1) I hope for a world in which the ethical equality of all men is recognised and man becomes the measure of all things, specially of the state which rules him. For if the state, which is the organ of government, is anti-human in its motives, as, for instance, the state built on the profit motive and pure pursuit of power, that state must go and make room for a humanist state.
- (2) I hope for a world in which the obvious primary degradation of poverty has been completely removed. So that men can have enough food, clothing and shelter to grow up as strong and healthy human beings, physically and mentally, and procreate a fine race to people the universe,

in the place of those stunted, subnormal, miserable millions, tortured by starvation, disease, unemployment and war, who have been the background of my life. I want this for all men and women, irrespective of race, colour, or creed, with special provisions for planned health and housing facilities for the backward and extra special provisions for the care of the very old and the very young.

- (3) I hope for a world in which every human being is entitled to free primary education and given the opportunity to prosecute further studies, or to learn a trade, under curricula designed by successive international commissions of educationists, scientists, philosophers, creative writers and citizens, sitting in collaboration with national commissions, chosen by the various homogeneous groups of the world. In this way all the enormous common knowledge could be pooled, distributed and related to the local needs of each culture group, on sound integral principles, without the domination of any particular race, religion, party, group or vested interest. The mental barriers which divide the world's peoples to-day would thus gradually wither away. Also, I would like to see the revision of the world's text-books, from the point of view of common human needs and interests, untrammelled by the dead hand of academism, so that books can release the potential creative energy of men, besides making room for the re-education of the badly taught adult populations of the world.
- (4) I hope for a world where men and women can enjoy real freedom (social, economic, political, intellectual and emotional freedom), in common with the other citizens of the world, that is to say, without encroaching upon the freedom of other peoples. I know that this aim is more easily propounded than realised, because we have been in the midst of bloody wars, and even territorial freedom, which is an elementary aspiration of homogeneous groups of peoples, has only lately come within sight of the vast portions of the world, and the duties and responsibilities of citizens and states are absolutely undefined. But, in a world which has to a great extent become an economic

unit and yet in which a war against Imperialist tyranny is going on, it is too late now to conserve the built-up power of several national sovereign states. That will surely mean more war. And, with the bigger and better bombs in the offing, specially with the atom bomb in its improved form, no one could at heart desire war. So that I hope for a world in which the sovereign states, after realising the myth of national freedom, will voluntarily abdicate some of their unlimited power, and pool their economic, military, political resources for world government.

(5) I hope for a world where men and women will awaken, through the first elementary battles for bread, peace, fresh air and freedom, which they are fighting to-day, to see the slow fire that is rising from the grey, smouldering ashes of their lives; so that, having struggled on a horizontal plane, they earn the right to stand perpendicular and touch the stars; so that they can perceive the true worth of their humanity, the dignity of man, to see how man can master himself and the world about him, how he can destroy the shams, hypocrisies and falsehoods, how he can become the maker of ever new worlds, the dreamer of ever new dreams, so that he can pour the sweat of his sinews and the grease of his brains into the slow fire and make it burgeon like a flame, the beacon light of a new human civilization, more glorious and resplendent than the infantile disorder in which we have existed and worked and suffered so long.

OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

To Amabel Williams-Ellis

There has been much talk in recent years about the cultural heritage of India. It is inevitable, of course, that those of us who love India, but who have been prevented from knowing anything about its past by a vicious system of education imposed on us by an alien government, should want, even if belatedly, to discover our heritage. Even the history of India as written by English historians has been widening its scope of late, so as to recognise and appreciate the value of India's cultural heritage. Lord Macaulay's blatant dictum that the whole of Sanskrit and Arabic literature was not worth a single shelf of a good European library, which was repudiated by many eminent Englishmen in his own time, or immediately after, is nowadays discounted. It is true that the English attitude towards our ancient civilisation has been sympathetic or adverse according as their political relations with our country required. For instance, the resentment and bitterness caused by the shock of the mutiny made Ruskin recoil back in horror from the exuberance of Indian sculpture. And then there was the kind of superciliousness of the scientific historian which, disguising a fundamental puritanism and the burra sahib's contempt, evidenced itself in the insidious calumnies of Vincent Smith. Again, the challenge of the emerging Indian nationalism, in the early years of the twentieth century, inflamed the dormant passions of our British rulers and brought the inuendo, the vituperation and the abuse which considerably disfigures the monumental *Cambridge History of India*. Perhaps it is only since the influence of Mr. Well's *Outline of History* began to be felt, and the necessity of social and economic changes in India began to seem inevitable as a logical result of the introduction of industrial forms in India, that Clio has become a somewhat conciliatory muse, dedicating herself to epic revaluations of India's past and discovering in her course a new imagery and a new metaphor. After Mr. Edward Thompson's gallant efforts in Indian history came the *Legacy of India*, edited by the late G. T. Garrat. And a great deal of lesser work by popular authors like Major Yeats Brown was followed by Mr. H. G. Rawlinson's *India: A Short Cultural History*. Since then there has been an increasing amount of collaboration between the many freedom-loving British intel-

lectuals and their Indian counterparts and there have been several tokens of sanity and goodwill between the forward minds of the two countries. Naturally, the serious study of India's cultural heritage and the writing of Indian history, is now mainly the responsibility of our own intellectuals. And the three volumes of the *Cultural Heritage of India* issued by the Ramakrishna Centenary Committee and Jawaharlal Nehru's historical writings are indicative of the emerging awareness among our compatriots that we alone can bring the sympathy needed for an intimate survey of our past. But we are not chauvinists and welcome the interest in our culture displayed by outsiders; and, as we believe that any future civilisation will be the product of the joint efforts of the best men in the shrunken world of today, we welcome among our midst all those who love us as much for our strengths as for our weaknesses.

As the interpretation of our culture proceeds apace, however, we have to cultivate a certain detachment to temper both the cautious attitude of the foreigners and much of the sentimental affection of our own compatriots for our country, and we have to ask a few fundamental questions without answering which we cannot see our cultural heritage in anything like a true perspective. Let me pose some of these questions here:

What precisely do we mean by our cultural heritage? Is it worth our while to resurrect from our past the memories of what, at their best, are only certain ideas and realities which are lost in myth and legend? And what value have they for our broken and tormented society of today? And, if it is worth our while to save this heritage, how is it to be saved?

Some years ago M. Paul Valery, the great French symbolist poet, roundly declared that the past of civilisation was a dead weight suitably entombed in the sepulchres of academic history and that it was better for the world to throw aside the weight of tradition and embrace the world with a fresh vision. And there is a seeming confirmation of this view in the fact, which most English historians of India adduce without asking the why and how of it, that the Hindus never wrote serious history. Also, there is a passage in the *Timaeus*, in which Plato speaks of the enviable lot of the Greeks, who came to live on virgin soil,

created their own gods at the same time as they created their cities, and remained unburdened by a past, free of all confusion, unweighted by memory.

It would seem at first sight that M. Valery, the ancient Hindus, as well as Plato, stand for a simplification that, by rejecting the past, may yield the leisure to luxuriate in a timeless present. But, I suspect that the very contrary of it is true, and our definition of our culture and the writing of history will be more adequate if we get down to the very root of this matter.

The writing of history presupposes the sense of time. But since time is more susceptible to change than space, it becomes easy for the superficial to think of historical facts in terms of certain fixed ideas or symbols, like Kings and Queens, without going into the ramifications of all those dynamic struggles and movements generated by the people. So that we often tend to regard the inert museum piece as one form of our cultural heritage and the traditional values and conventions established by polite society as another.

Whereas, our cultural heritage, if it means anything at all, can only be looked at humanly, socially and biologically, in so far as we are heirs to life, in so far as we are the products of a multitude of forces, acting and reacting on each other through the amalgamation, not only of the fundamental economic and political values but of all the superstructure of belief and reason which are summed up in folk culture, and religious and aesthetic values of individuals, from sentimental experience to scientific opinion and logical reasoning.

The beginnings of culture were in the tilling of the soil, the rearing of silkworms, bees and flowers. Therefore, its sources lie in the life of the peoples, in the feelings and aspirations of the ordinary folk around their work, even though it expresses itself in universal forms through the abstract ideas which define ultimate values and excellences, archetypes of perfection. If we contemplate our past heritage, therefore, we can only look at it, in the words of a savant, as if it were 'a great tree rooted in the soil though it soars to the sky'. . . .

And, even in looking at our cultural heritage thus, we are not merely accepting the yearnings and the struggles of our ancestors, as well as the values, notions and concepts they evolved, but, in full view of the needs of the moment, we seek to assimilate, to realise, to transform what we accept into the pattern of our own existence. In other words, all these historical beginnings, all these heritages are not to be viewed as merely so many abstract ideas and theories which will illumine our present problems and which will help us through the revival of this creed, or that dogma, to live anew, but we have to regard these histories as facts, realities, the achievements of the human spirit, which must be ordered and arranged and submitted to the tests of the living consciousness, of actuality, to see how much and what they have contributed to the making of us. And in the cross-fertilisation of the literature and the art of the past with the life of today, we can weave a web that embraces our multifarious strivings. Our cultural heritage does not remain, then, merely the decorative array of a number of works of art in our museums which tickle our national pride, but becomes the embodiment of a living tradition.

It is precisely because none of the historians of India have so far attempted to see history as embodied in the myths and the legends of our country, in the comic and tragic folk tales of our peasantry, as well as in the symbols and designs of our amorphous religions, that most of them think India has no history. It is because many of them trace the history of our civilisation in terms of generalities, rather than as the story of the groups of little peoples who inhabited our landscapes, with certain manners and customs, performing certain deeds and pronouncing certain words, that we get the hash and rehash of long familiar generalisations passing for appreciation of Indian culture.

The Younghusband-Rawlinson kind of approach which wafts a little incense before the established idols of the past is, of course, mostly unconscious. I have no doubt that it is inspired by a genuine enough humanitarianism. But, nevertheless, it cannot catch the spirit of our civilisation. And it leads to the curious policy adopted by many foreign Governments in the East, who, however absurd and inferior they consider native cultures, encourage even the most hackneyed and antiquated forms of

these cultures by spending liberally to recast, build and preserve imitation pagodas when they have no money to spare for free primary education to give the living cultural heritage of the people a new life and a new significance.

There has been, as everyone knows, the more conscious approach of the European scholars, exemplified at its best in the work of Professor Max Muller, and at its worst in Professor L. D. Barnett. The former was a German rather too anxious to trace his kinship with the Aryan brother, but, at any rate, in spite of his exaggerations, a conscientious enough translator who devoted a life-time of research to the ideals embodied in the *Vedas*. And though his special studies precluded a comprehensive view, his attitude was, by and large, adequate to his purpose and he showed his affection for old India: 'If I were to ask myself,' he wrote, 'from what literature we in Europe, who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thought of the Greeks and the Romans and our Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more universal, in fact, more human, I should point to India'. But in the case of the second interpreter, one reads his querulous introduction to the *Bhagavad Gita* in Dent's classics and one asks why on earth he troubled to translate the text of this book and to expatiate on it at such length, if he had such a low opinion about Hindu thought in general and about the *Gita* in particular.

Then there is the sentimental approach of our own indigenous Arya Samajis and other fanatical Hindus which honours the past by paying it the homage of a sigh and seeks to revive the Vedic age entire.

The past of India is certainly ours. But how are we to save it to make it ours?

As I have tried to show, any survey of our past heritage which does not study it in relation to our own time, but aims to borrow a theory, or a way of life, from history is doomed to failure. Especially, as in the case of India, our old way of life and our ancient ideals are wrapped up in the religious philosophy of Hinduism which, the Yogis of Mayfair and Manhattan apart, the vast majority of our peoples neither accept nor reject, but

believe in as a miscellaneous set of formulae, which in practice they seek most of the time to repeat as *puja path* without much faith, even as they allow constant encroachments on its taboos by the forces of the new modern industrial civilisation.

The schemata of most of the historians of our culture is the usual one, familiar by now even to the proverbial intelligent man for whom guide books are written: There were the Aryan conquerors of India, who wrote the Vedas, and their successors who composed the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and evolved the caste system. Then there were other conquerors, the Scythians, the Huns, the Muhammadans who all did their bit—especially the Mughals. Nowadays, of course, the historians begin their books earlier than their predecessors. For, as a result of the excavations at Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, some evidence of a unique layer of Indian civilisation of an earlier date has become available. The general idealism of the Vedanta looms large in all these surveys. A brief reference to the dramatists of the Classical age, and to the grammarians of the Mediaeval period and the whole business is rounded off by an exposition of Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism.

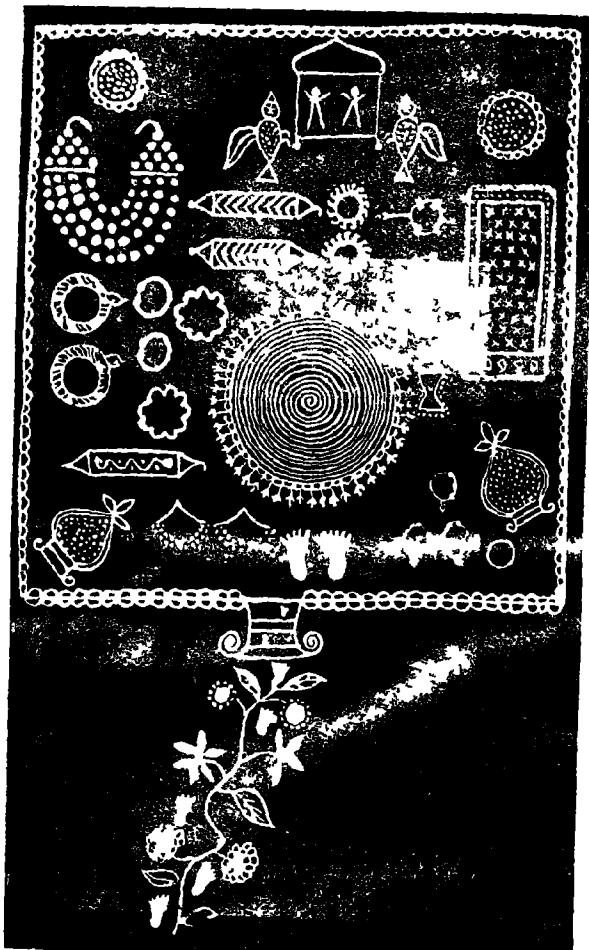
One looks in vain in such surveys for any knowledge about the original neolithic inhabitants of India, for a description of the flights of fancy evidenced in their lovely stone carvings of tree spirits, or the myths embodied in the heavy, monoliths of Mother Earth itself. Have these historians, one asks, ever read the more human stories included in the *Mahabharata*? Or seen the significance of some of the moral ideas enshrined in the myths and the legends that became current in the various periods? Is it likely that the peasant, the potter, the maker of toys and the bard of any time, may give a far truer picture of developments than the great currents which are supposed to run through the various periods. In fact, it may be that the series of poems and pictures around the Krishna cult are more useful to the cultured persons of today than the allegorical generalisations which interpret them, important as these latter are. For it is in a synthesis of the beauty, the subtlety and the human qualities of past culture with that of our own day, that lies our hope of using our heritage effectively.

The jibe that the Hindus never wrote any history cannot be sustained in the face of the imaginative work of a whole succession

of poets, saints, artists, priests and story tellers, who, though they may not yield such respectable evidence as our scientific historians desire, certainly continued to develop new folk forms almost century by century. And, however indeterminate these early periods may be, there is enough in the vast mass of stories and ballads, lyrics and epics to make the basis of a comprehensive survey of the societies from which these documents of human culture sprang up. And, essentially, this kind of multifarious material also dictates a new point of view of looking at history, perhaps from a typically Indian point of view, the attitude of comprehensiveness, with its corollary that truth is many sided and not necessarily the monopoly of any one group or sect, and that tolerance is the supreme virtue.

If, indeed, the choice is to be made between the bird's eye point of view of studying Indian history and the worm's eye point of view I, for one, would plump for the latter. For the bird's eye point of view involves an emphasis on the Vedantic truth, as it has been interpreted by Shankara, for instance: 'The over-soul is the one eternal verity.....the rest is illusion'. Whereas the worm's eye point of view shows that our past is not one thing or the other, but enshrined in our various energies, in our various strengths and weaknesses, in our many achievements and many failures, and that it is essentially human. One God, one book, one leader, one country was never the slogan of our peoples, and dogmatism and fanaticism were discouraged. And, in the vast majority of the saints of India, especially in the Mediaeval poets, Kabir, Chaitanya, Nanak, Mirabai and Tuka Ram, the concern for a human truth, a human philosophy and a human religion is most pronounced, probably because, sprung from the soil, they conceded a great deal to the little people, whose chief virtue is the heart!

It is often asserted that the character of the early societies of India was static over long periods and that the latter feudalism showed a continuity and a sameness which makes a story of its various phases superfluous. But how then are the variations in art forms to be explained? Did not even the caste system take a long time to develop? And was not the revolt of the Buddha against the metaphysical idealism of the Brahmins symptomatic of a great ferment whose cultural impulses resulted from the



Alpaca

people's urge for a more humanised religion? And how did the Indian sensibility flow out again, after the development of a great many different schools of philosophical thought in the drama of the golden age, in Ajanta with all the warmth of a passionate life bursting through the moon breasts and wine-jar hips of lovely women involved in festivals of dance and song? And why the exuberant vitality of mediaeval Indian sculpture, so different from the classical Gupta period? How came it to be that the tradition of wall painting lapsed for so many centuries only to re-emerge through certain survivals in the folk art of Gujarat of the 15th century and the Rajput painting of the 18th and 19th centuries? Why the rich, sensuous, lyrical as well as epic love poetry of the mediaeval singers? And how the survival of the loveliest folk forms beneath the contemporary decadence?

All these changes relate back to slow changes in the social life of India, which will have to be studied in all its ramifications, in terms of the creative impulses of our ancestors and in terms of the forces and ideas they generated, if it is to be rescued from the fossilised, generalising mind, and if the past of India is to become ours. Meanwhile, it is obvious that the real history of India has not yet begun to be written, and the whole of Indian culture is waiting to be claimed by its true inheritors.

HOMAGE TO RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

To Bishnu Dey

If a generalisation be permitted, the intellectual history of India during the last hundred and fifty years may be regarded as the history of a prolonged frustration. The impact of western machine civilisation broke up the flaccid, parochial life of our old, self-enclosed villages; rail and road connected the mud huts to the brick-built towns, and the towns to the enormous metropolises of the world; and there began a new ferment, the excitement of a time of rapid change, the stirrings of a transitional age.

But, because the transformation was initiated by alien authority, without much thought of clearing the debris or of repairing some of the dilapidated ruins which had not been erased in the process, the world that emerged was a hotchpotch of several surviving cultures persisting side by side with the new civilisation, without the emergence of a distinctive pattern. The will of the people to relate their traditional modes to the new situation was thwarted from the start. Indian society thus fell into the welter of a mental confusion in which the outworn customs of the darkest feudal past rubbed shoulders with the most modern impulses.

The fact that, both at home and abroad, English isolationism began to dam the flood gates which had opened, made the confusion worse confounded. For instance, Lord Macaulay's attempt to make Indians talk English was on a par with Alexander III's forcible imposition of Russian on his Polish, Finnish and German subjects. And the new education scheme which Bentinck sanctioned in 1835, was deliberately calculated to bring into contempt the ancient culture of India and to introduce a counterfeit of the English system in order to provide clerks for the various Government departments. To add to all the other inhibitions came the vigilant guard on dangerous thoughts.

Under the circumstances the continuous mental effort necessary to diagnose the ills of society, which is the harbinger of a creative age, became difficult; while experiments in replacement and renewal were doomed to take place in the vicious circle of a society which frowned upon all radical talk.

I do not mean to suggest that there is any exact correspondence between the outer social life of an epoch and the art of that epoch, otherwise how could the great writers in our languages have produced their work in the modern era at all. The dialectic of art is subtler. The inventive artist is, for instance, much more concerned with processes than with the beginnings and ends of these processes. And social activity, concerning itself as it does with the outer forms of life, does not necessarily approximate, in time, to the personal and psychological curves of an age. But, in so far as social action ultimately seeks to recreate the institutions which it attacks, its inter-connection with cultural change may be taken for granted.

The French Revolution, for instance, owed not a little to the prognostications of the 18th century Encyclopaedists, from Voltaire and Diderot to Condorcet, who were themselves led to destroy on paper all the established institutions, from the divine right of kings and the church to bad education, by the reaction under which they grew up. And the same is true of the Russian Revolution which came after the thorough-going criticism of society by Lenin, as well as the great Russian writers from Pushkin to Tolstoy and Gorky.

The lack of much free and uninhibited thinking during the Edwardian and Georgian eras in India, the failure to map the sun-soaked horizons, as well as the deliberate prolongation of old custom and the suppression of new knowledge—all this engendered the frustration of the intelligentsia and the side-tracking of much heroic effort in our renaissance.

I believe that Rabindranath Tagore was a unique phenomenon, in so far as he was one of the few great writers of modern India who consciously fought against this frustration and made a sustained effort at creating an art at high pressure.

* Of course, it is possible for a sentimentalist to see into Homer more than Homer wrote. And I am not unconscious of the turgidity, the vapidity and repetitiveness of much of his writing. It is said that throughout his writing career Shakespeare never blotted out a line; and several people, including myself, have often wished that he had been less jingoist in his historical plays. Rabindranath Tagore lived to be over eighty years, and it is believed that

each day he wrote a poem, a play or a story. Naturally, therefore, at times he overwrote. And critics like D. P. Mukerji and Amiya Chakravarti are doing great service by sifting the gold from the dross. But I am not fulfilling the functions of a critic here when I draw attention to his unique position as the source of much of our culture. I want rather to bring out three salient characteristics of his genius which, in spite of all the multifarious strains of his work, are, in my opinion, his chief contributions to our renaissance, facets of his creative activity from which we can take inspiration at this moment.

1

The first great contribution of Rabindranath Tagore to our renaissance was to insist on the fact of this renaissance itself, to make us conscious that we are involved in the process of rebirth as a whole people. I mean by this that, at a very early stage in his literary career, he began to concentrate on those essentially human emotions and ideas which are at the base of all external institutions, which continually well up in the hearts and minds of people and have to be renewed in times of stress, so that when analysed they can supply the basis of the actual life of a changing community, which form the source of the values by which society lives, the poetic or philosophic content, or the principles of life of a new civilisation.

The scion of a noble family, growing up in the tradition of the Bengali revival of the 19th century, Tagore was favourably placed both to receive the poetic and literary influence of the classical tradition and Western learning. But it is the pertinacity of instinct with which he soaked himself in the folk culture of Bengal and, while imbibing the genuine impulses of the West escaped from the grooves of imitative English forms, which were current among the intelligentsia of his time, that is of value for us. For, it shows that the real synthesis can be achieved in our time only by going back for inspiration to the rich arts and literatures of our village tradition, at the same time as we drink at the fountains of alien cultures. In this sense Tagore bridged the gulf between the old world and the new world, and in this way he came to be for us a symbol of real modernism in India.

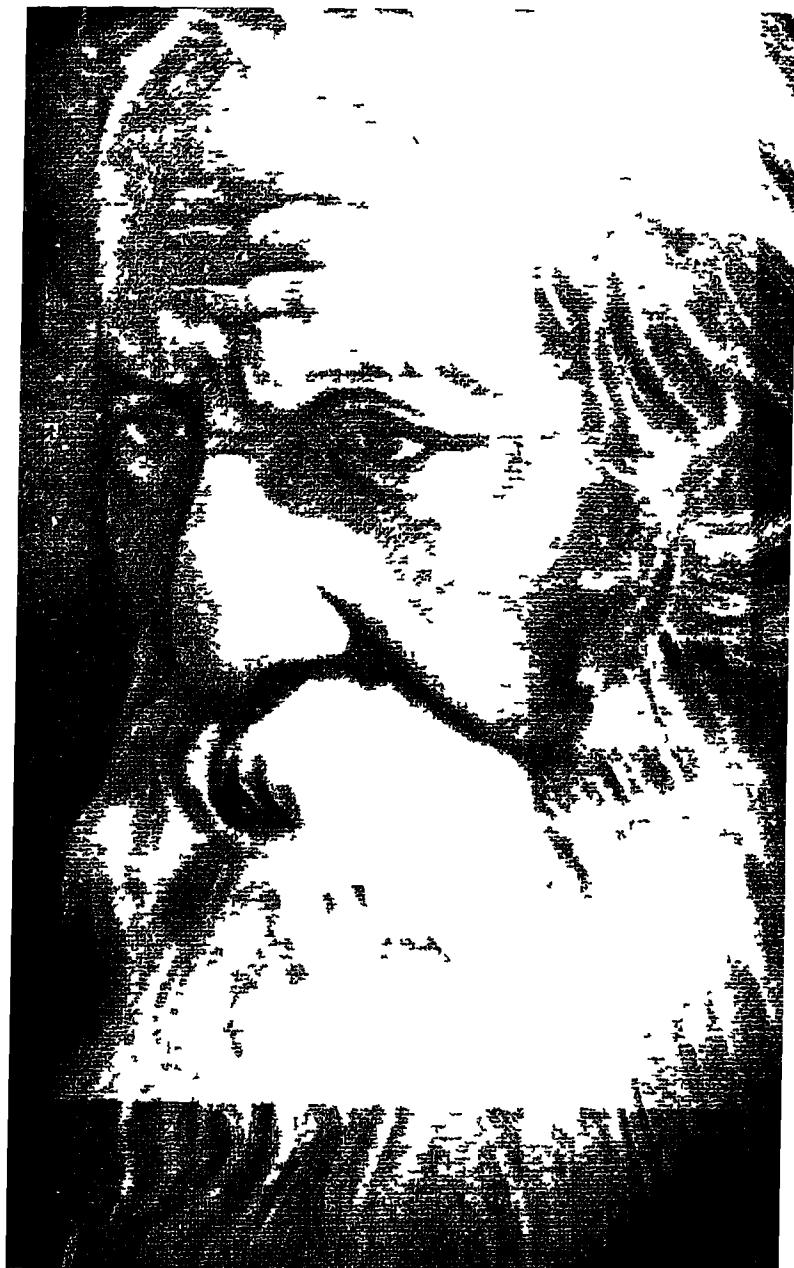
Apart from his juvenilia, and the early poems written under the influence of his Sanskrit studies, every one has heard of the

effect on his sensibility of the Vaishnava lyrics. But few have realised how intimate was his debt to the folk songs of those animistic and totemistic peoples who lived in the self-enclosed congeries of hamlets cut off from all contact with town life. Among those communities the age-old culture of the country had filtered down and been thoroughly absorbed, and it had developed into an indigenous culture, vital enough to resist all attacks from outside and to tinge strongly anyone who came into contact with it. Rabindranath has often recorded the joy with which he entered into the wonderland of this heritage of folk tales and lyrics, and how he drank himself to ecstasy on these simple songs, or the villages-poems addressed to the powers of nature, the air, the water, the trees, the rivers and the hills, richly sensuous as they are deep, humorous as they are tragic. And it was not only from folk song, or from folk legend and story, but from the popular versions of Buddhism and Hinduism current in teeming Bengal that Tagore evolved a pantheon to symbolise his own mental struggles.

The wedding of folk culture with the technique he had learnt from the West is a remarkable transformation. He took his poetry to the earth. He gave back the songs he took from the people as highly finished lyrics to the people, so that they are now sung in the humblest cottages and so that they have made the local dialect of Bengal into one of the great modern languages of the world. Unique enough in translation, the difficulties of transposing the sentiments of one poetry into another have prevented the range of his experimentations and of his innovations, as well as the spirit which informs his work, from being reflected in the foreign versions of his books. But if any single writer taught his countrymen how to know nature, it was Rabindranath Tagore. For he inspired the people with the belief that man can conquer nature, possess it and reap the rich fruits that it can yield. Always, he was 'where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones' as he says in the *Gitanjali*. And, already before the turn of the century, on the strength of that alliance between his genius and the genius of the men of the soil, through which he ushered the renaissance in our country, he had become to our land what Pushkin had been to Russia, Whitman to America and Wordsworth and Coleridge to England.

I have deliberately emphasised the fact that Tagore went to the people for inspiration, because the intelligentsia of his time, as well as of our own, shows a tendency to despise the only integral tradition of culture which has survived among us to any extent, the culture of our primitive, closely-knit communities, on the basis of which alone a renaissance can be built up. Tagore realised, as Tolstoy did in Russia, that most of the life-giving qualities, simplicity, sincerity, sensibility, remain among the people while the false, imitative, pretentious gestures of the middle sections lead to vulgarity. And though we have no reason to romanticise our down-trodden people, the prey to many weaknesses, we know that they are the womb of our race, the source of all our strengths and frailties, the resilient core of our civilisation, who have kept our tradition alive, in however broken and bruised a form. They have been decimated in wars, they have been wiped out by floods, famines and droughts; they have suffered and persisted perhaps in larger numbers than any other peoples, but they have survived and multiplied. And our destiny is bound up with them as of children to their parents, for we have to inherit the memories of their suffering and we have to expiate it in our art. We have to tend their disease-ridden bodies and heal them, for the malaise of our society is not cogenital and can be cured if only we realise that the basic commodities, bread, rice, medicine, books, light, freedom and peace can be produced on a very large scale to-day and that there are enough of these to go round the world if we all so desire. Above all, in this hour of the crisis of urban civilisation, when we live continually under sentence of death from the threat of the atom bomb, we can bathe ourselves in the immortal spirit of our people and achieve the moral strength with which they have always struggled against the brute force of one tyrant after another.

When I plead that we should take this notion of struggle from our people, I do not mean merely the negative form of this idea which consists in a blind but resilient submission to "fate" or "kismet"; I mean rather that we should take the activist doctrine of love and devotion, the spirit of service and togetherness, through which they remained knit together in small self-governing communities so long, tolerantly seeking for truth in all their various ways, making houses, digging the ditches in the fields, painting crude designs in red ochre, and singing songs.



Portrait of Tagore

I believe that Rabindranath Tagore showed an appreciation of the nature of our people's strength in weakness when he, an aristocrat and leader of the intelligentsia, went to the people for inspiration. And we, as an intelligentsia, will ignore the lesson at our peril. For I repeat we stand between the old world and the new world, and we know that whereas in the old world men were helpless victims of the various unknown fates, Nature and Evil in men and the blind forces of economic law, in the new world we can transform whole facts of barren land and wastes, and educate ourselves into the highest awareness. So we have no choice but to help to build up and perfect the renaissance or to lapse through inertia and indecision, and stagnate and accept spiritual death. I have no doubt of the choice we will make. Only, we shall have to root out of ourselves all traces of fear or contempt for the people. In fact, we will have to begin by recognising, in our country, where man has been used so long merely as a beast of burden, the fundamental dignity of man, belief in him and faith in his capacity to build, with his hands, his heart and his brain, the new democratic civilisation which it is our purpose to create.

2

If the attempt at a new religion of man was the first great contribution which Rabindranath Tagore made to our renascent effort, his second significant contribution was to incarnate some of the chief types of the emerging middle and lower middle sections of Bengal in his writing and to re-integrate the arts of poetry, drama, story, and particularly the novel, in our country. And in this he showed an even greater courage than any other Indian of his generation. For he was not afraid to present his own people to themselves, and the whole world, as they really are, without the fear of being abused and condemned for revealing them as saints and sinners, free spirits and chauvinists, parochial, slave-minded mendicants for favours and devotees, great peoples as well as small peoples, as great as any in the world and very small. But in this respect also he did more than merely reflect the life of the region of Bengal. He caught it in the grip of that peculiar moral tension which has arisen among us, through the clash of the two dominating traditions, the incoming hedonism of the

West and the various strands of religion and custom of our own society.

That is to say he showed how the individual, in the modern sense, began to arise in our society. And, more than his subject matter, he took the technique of prose fiction forward. The nature of his contribution to the making of an emotive prose style, by the amalgamation of the literary language and common speech, has often been ignored because he was known in Europe, primarily as a mystic poet. But, on the strength of his early novels alone, I will make so bold as to claim that Tagore was in the 'formal' sense the *first novelist of India*.

Some people may wonder why, in view of the fact that so many novels were written in ancient India, why, in spite of the fact that before him Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had written copious fiction, I have chosen to call him 'the first novelist of India'. So, before I come to mention the names of some of the fascinating individuals he created in his novels, let me explain what I mean by 'the novel', and why I have so summarily dismissed Tagore's predecessors and successors in this field of activity. In a word I want to differentiate between the old novel, or 'recital' as I should like to call it, from the new 'novel' in the contemporary sense.

The novel as an art form, with its own integral laws, arose in Western Europe roughly about a century and a half ago through the growth of an industrial society which needed a highly finished mirror to reflect its complex problems. It is far in advance of the early mythical and poetic narratives, or even of the prose narratives born of the printing press, where whole chunks of books are strung together without much respect for the laws of balance and proportion.

Now, if we remember that the 'novel' form has an inner coherence and sensitive logic of its own, we may roughly say that it has tended to be an ever more skilful representation of events in time, seeking the illusion of life through a dramatic sequence based on development of character. As such it is distinct from what, for want of a better word, may be called a report or a recital, which is the presentation of past events, as crudely as

when an Arabian story-teller recounts a tale or as subtly as when a narrator regulates the reproduction in the light of his own, or some one else's external opinions.

This is a somewhat tentative definition. But one can see that the long or short romantic narratives in the Indian epics, or the kavyas, court stories, which developed from them, are still myth and legend, while Tagore's *Broken Ties* is a novelette; one can see that the *Adventures of Ten Princes* by Dandin, who lived in the latter half of the 7th century, is prose recital whereas *The Home and the World* by Tagore is an essay in the novel form; one can even see that *Anandamath* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is an historical recital, while *Gora* by Tagore is an attempt at an historical novel.

The parallel with Europe really makes this point more obvious. For it was not until the break up of the collective life of the middle ages that poetry had begun to be personal and individualistic in the West; it was not until the rise of the scientific spirit and the empirical outlook later that the prose narratives had prospered there, and it needed a whole series of commercial and cultural developments, the breakdown of feudalism, the expansion of trade and the rise of a highly developed industrial society, to make the transition from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the flood of 18th and 19th century fiction. Much of this fiction remained mere recital, though with the emerging self-awareness of the middle classes in Europe, the novel in its dramatic sense was already beginning to take shape.

If, however, we ask why the novel form was not achieved in India before the time of Rabindranath Tagore, the answer is that the changes which took place in Western Europe through the advent of the industrial revolution, did not begin to take place in India until almost the end of the 19th century. But, as soon as Indian society began to break up under the impact of Europe, the old narratives remained only as survivals, and the modernist Tagore began to attempt more complex patterns to present the psychological relationship of individual men and women in the newly arising society of Bengal. And the time was ripe for the emergence of the novel in India as an integral form.

It is in this sense that I choose to regard Tagore as the first novelist of India. For, although Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the predecessor of Rabindranath Tagore, has the vitality of experience and a grasp of life frequently absent in Tagore, he is mainly a romancier, who is extending the old myth and legend of India, and the recital element survives in his work almost as in the lay of an ancient bard, minstrel or troubadour. It is true that Bankim displays intense feeling and even attempts to create character, as in *Rajani* or *Krishna Kanta's* Will, but even at his best he remains a story teller, like that awful obtuse feudalist, Sir Walter Scott, on whom he modelled himself. In fact, he does not seem to have bothered much about technique and is content to tell us of things as they are, or have taken place, rather than of how and why they took place. Apart from this hair-raising recitalism his range is limited by his religious fanaticism. So that his work cannot be considered as a great advance on the older fiction, except in so far as it was written in the 19th century and was cast in the form loosely called "the novel."

I will not say that Tagore is altogether free from all, or, at least, some of the surviving traces of recitalism, but, all the same, he is a self-conscious artist in the novel form. And if there is a certain redundancy and a lack of vigour in his fiction as compared to Bankim's, it is more than compensated for by his lyricism and his sensitiveness. Alone among our 19th century writers, he shows a sense of humour in the midst of tragedy. And he has an uncanny gift for penetrating into the hearts, especially of his female characters. For who among us has created that eternal type of the Indian mother as in *Anandamoi* in *Gora*. Or that self-sacrificing, devoted girl who tames the priggish Gour Mohan in the same novel? Even Bimala, the sincere but muddled wife of the liberal landlord Nikhil in the *Home of the World* is relieved in her blind and foolish worship of the manoeuvring fire-brand Sandip by the gentle and constant devotion she gives to an ideal. And the village girl in *The Wreck* shines like a flame in the face of all the oppression of society, forcing the hedonist lover, Ramesh, to respect her even as he longs for his beloved girl graduate from Calcutta. To the end this kind of woman recurs in Tagore's novels, the typical Indian women whom we have so often met in life, and whom Tagore brings before us, sometimes shrill,

sometimes gentle and devoted and always saying 'I want, I want', but challenging us, almost accusing us with the words: 'I constitute one half of Indian Civilisation, the suppressed half.'

Then there are the old men of Tagore's novels, Paresh Babu, the patriarch in *Gora*, who is more or less the same figure with a new name as Ananda Babu in *The Wreck*; or the rationalist uncle in *Broken Ties* the wise old men who are always the guides, philosophers and mentors of all and sundry, consulting physicians of an old and bed-ridden society, who have diagnosed the age in which they live and who pass on their knowledge, and help the young to usher in the new life. In this type, too, Tagore has delineated perhaps an idealised version of the cultured old gentleman whom we knew so well a quarter of a century ago, the liberal, common-sensical spirits who recommended "Sweet reasonableness" even as they compromised on the golden mean and whom we ignored or despised because we thought they lived in a kind of 'no man's land'. Tagore's portrayal of them teaches us that we must beware of adopting the cheap, histrionic manner of the European young in regard to old men, that we must not consider them as only fit for the rubbish bin, even though we do not share many things in common with them.

And then there are Tagore's young heroes, a whole galaxy of contemporary Indian portraits, from the lovers who have learnt through modern education not to regard women as mere landscapes, the friends Gora and Benoy, and Amulya, the young student, devoted unto death, and the tough Europeanised share-pushers and go-getters, Haran, Sandip, Amrit Roy and Co. Representatives of our age, they do not offer much hope; bitter, disillusioned, impetuous, mostly concerned to make romantic gestures, they are only relieved by the fact that Rabindranath shows very skilfully how much more they are sinned against than sinning. Victims of Moloch, they lapse for lack of opportunities, leaving their ideals behind them. But in the lovable and human qualities which cling even to the most vicious of them, they remain in our memory as the poignant symbols of fighters who fell in the all-embracing, manifold, struggle of our generation to find a new way of life.

And this brings me to the third aspect of Tagore's genius, his search for a new way of life. For throughout his work this one fact predominates the atmosphere—that the struggle for a new way of life is eternal, perennial and on many different planes, and that it is primarily always the struggle for new values, the struggle to be human, to be individual.

What is to be done, he continually asks? How are we to live between Asia and Europe? What are to be the fundamental values of our civilisation? So intense and honest is his search for values that I believe this third contribution of Rabindranath Tagore is probably the most significant for us immediately, because of the wide variety of thoughtful suggestions he has made as to which institutions we should accept in the historic transition in which we are involved, and which way of life we should choose to live by.

From the beginning of his career as a writer, Rabindranath Tagore was not only a poet but a philosopher. The early influence of his father, Maharishi Debendranath Tagore, the mystic founder of the Brahmo Samaj, brought him into contact with ancient Hindu thought.

'To me', he wrote in the *Sadhana*, 'the verses of the Upanishads and the teaching of the Buddha have ever been things of the spirit, and, therefore, endowed with boundless vital growth and I have used them both in my own life and in my preaching as instinct with individual meaning for me as for others, and awaiting their confirmation my own special testimony must have its value because of its individuality.'

But his was no mere pedantic, parrot-like repetition of holy incantations and spiritual formulas. Rather it was an attempt to define a new set of spiritual values which could contribute something genuine to the solution of the intellectual crisis which was spreading from the West through the impact of 19th century science and rationalism. 'The mantram which gives our spiritual vision its right of entrance into the soul of all things is the mantram of India,' he said, 'the mantram of peace, of Goodness and Unity—Santam, Sivam, Advaitam. The distracted mind of the

West is knocking at the gates of India for this. And is it to be met with a hoarse shout of exclusion?

In thus seizing upon the fundamental conflict of Asia and Europe, roughly representing the conflict between belief and unbelief, he showed the same insight as Goethe did in the Germany of his time. And, like Goethe, he incidentally sought to seek for the meaning and purpose of life, away from the dogma of an authoritarian church, and mere academism, and thus helped us to live a richer life.

His definition of 'spiritual' experiences was, indeed, completely unconventional. For instance, he regarded much of the materialism of the West in social relations as essentially spiritual in character. And he may be said to be the first Indian modern who inclined to the view that a new faith based on man's creative potentialities in art and literature, music, philosophy and science may arise and, through that, a new world may be built up, far greater and higher in accomplishment than that which has been going down before our own eyes.

I must confess that I do not share his belief in some of the sanctions which he felt impelled to invoke from time to time. He was a pilgrim who carried a great deal of luggage on his back, souvenirs from our long past, mementos, charms, and tokens etc. We, who are young, prefer to travel a little lighter. But I would be ungrateful if I did not record here the immense debt which our generation owes him for showing us that there are other ways of living than those thickly encrusted doxies, castes and creeds, which, often cloaking venal greed, selfishness and love of power, have fought each other in history and brought so much misery, bitterness and frustration to generations of men, including our own.

If, after lifting the weight of dogma off our minds, he left us all free to find our own individual beliefs, this is not to say that he did not recommend a number of ways in which we could tackle the most pressing problems of our age.

For instance, in regard to science he realised fairly early, what we have come to see much later, that it should be regarded as a means and not as an end. He saw, even during the heyday of the

scientific endeavour of the 19th century, that in limiting their field of inquiry to inductive experiments under laboratory conditions, and in despising philosophers for pronouncing judgement on reality, the scientists were assuming a pontifical solemnity which would soon yield to a fit of humility in the face of unanswerable questions. True to the tradition of the old Indian sages he assimilated the reports of the laboratory but never forgot that the beauty of falling water is not in the formula H_2O , but in the colour, the sheen and the movement of water. In effect he was a poet of science. He hailed Darwinism and the Spencerian philosophy as great achievements of the observing mind, and he showed the deepest sympathy for Huxley's attempt to show the radical difference between men and the lower animals, but he never succumbed to the specialism of the 19th century European intellectuals. To the end he remained a whole man, actively interested in the aesthetic, social, moral and political life of his time. And, through all experience, the inner flame, in the light of which he contemplated the world, was more important to him than the mere sensationalism which registers *impressions*: 'I am praying to be lighted from within', he said, 'and not simply to hold a light in my hand'.

The tendency of his thoughts, was, therefore, mainly modern and humanist. And he believed that, given courage and vision, man could subdue nature and himself sufficiently to his higher ends.

But what are the more concrete proposals he made to cure this sorry, sick world of ours! I think that, by and large, he believed with D'Holbach that until social thinking revolutionises ideas and transforms institutions, the common life of society cannot advance.

And as he apprehended the nature of the change in the catastrophic upheavals of our age and yet saw that this change was not integral but mostly mechanical and superficial, and, at the cost of much that he himself valued in the past, he crusaded for exchange of knowledge among the nations through a new kind of universalism. This ideal, a noble precursor of the dreams of our own day is peculiarly Indian in feeling. It is an aspect of the tolerance which has characterised our history in spite of all our conflicts, a kind of sympathy or compassion which was the

basis of our old humanisms. Being a vast collection of peoples and nationalities ourselves, a kind of miniature cosmos of our own, with ten distinct major languages, and yet knit together for two thousand years by a common culture, we in India can claim to have been possessed by a strong passion for universalism for a very long, long time. The universalism of the old Buddhist ideal was proved when it travelled across frontiers and took roots in ancient China and Japan. Similarly the influence of the philosophy of the *Vedanta* on modern German thought, especially through Hegel and Schopenhauer, and on recent British thinkers, shows that the tendency of our thought has been mainly unitary and universalist. But it was through Rabindranath Tagore that Indian Universalism became known to the modern world.

I think that he had vaguely foreseen, even before the first world war, how a country organised as a military force and integrated in its own selfish economy, was potentially an aggressive force. And he felt that the older forms of nationalism, the King state, as well as the middle class state which followed the French Revolution, were already passing away and yielding to the state in which a new kind of man was emerging. And with a world vision far in advance of his time, he tried to shift the emphasis from national rights to individual rights and from political to economic rights at a time when national rights were being secured and local struggles were being waged in the bulk of the world with an aggressive intensity. And he stood for a rough and ready functional association of nations across frontiers, so that the claims of nationality should not become too exclusive. He was, therefore, our first real internationalist.

The final and decisive power to hold the peoples of the world together should, he felt, be left to the tolerance that the new type of man might practice. And he had in mind the tradition which had united the multinational populations of India in a common civilisation for long periods, in spite of their disparities.

But though he was a visionary who believed that, in sentiment, a multi-national civilisation was on the way through which individuals and nations might surrender their powers, he knew as an Indian, that, in actual fact, several of the potentially freedom-loving nations were handicapped by the numerous aggressive nations, built on greed and plunder.

So he struggled against the imperialists of his day with a resilience that lends to his political thought a peculiar realism as well as a visionary quality.

Nor was he merely concerned to make paper pleas. He took active steps to put his ideas into practice. Despising the 'mendicancy' of our own politics on the one hand, and the exclusive cult of nation in Europe on the other, he believed that a new kind of education alone could restore the balance and create real international understanding.

That was the kind of feeling which actuated him to open the world famous school at Shantiniketan in Bolpur, Bengal, that later developed into the nucleus of an international university, the *Visva Bharati*. Here the young from all parts of the world were brought up in harmony with nature, and each other, and allowed to absorb, in an atmosphere of creative activity, as much and what they liked of book knowledge, and to cultivate their sensibilities, so that they could grow up to be healthy individuals, independent, capable of taking initiative, happy and free from racial and national bias.

Also he travelled widely in Europe, America and the Far East to promote world unity. And, with a fearlessness of spirit rare in intellectuals nowadays, he continued to utter warning after warning of the nemesis that would overtake civilisation if the nations continued to flout all scruples in their lust for economic exploitation and political supremacy.

When, however, after the betrayals of their plighted word by the great powers in China, Abyssinia, Spain and Czechoslovakia against which he had vehemently protested, the second world war at last came, he delivered one of the most moving personal addresses to the students of his international university on his eightieth birthday. It was a kind of reckoning in view of the judgement day, and he spoke from his heart, a bitter and disappointed man, but one who had not yet lost his faith in man:

'It is now no longer possible for us to retain any respect for that mockery of civilization which believes in ruling by force and has no faith in freedom at all.'

'To-day my one last hope is that the deliverer will be born in this poverty-stricken country.'

Are not those words the echo auguries of our own thoughts?

ON THE STUDY OF INDIAN ART.

To Shahid Suhrawardy

There has been so much confusion and muddle in the criticism of Indian art that it becomes necessary before coming face to face with a painting or a piece of sculpture to clear the rubbish of falsehood, prejudice and sentimentality that we have all, to a more or less extent, inherited during the last half century from our forefathers and near contemporaries. Such an effort at scavenging is bound to make one a pariah, because any attempt at re-evaluating the basis of criticism is likely to be frowned upon by the pundits. This is one of the penalties of radicalism and one must accept it as an inevitable punishment for heresy. Since, however, one is also a heretic against oneself, because one has shared many of the prejudices of one's elders and early teachers, the punishment is well deserved, so one must learn humility and allow oneself to be re-educated. For that is the only way in which one can help the renaissance of art and literature, in which we are involved, to be put on a sounder basis.

That a great deal of falsehood, prejudice and sentimentality has indeed accrued to us, there is hardly any doubt. In almost all art discussion, of course, anywhere in the world, the wildest generalisations are made by the contending schools. But in most free countries these controversies generally tend to be centred round individual preferences in technique or on differences of emphasis about the nature of the contemporary crisis in human affairs and its incidence on art. Whereas in India, apart from differences on all these questions, the very basic assumptions about art have been open to violent discussion, since our conquest by an alien people. For, by imposing their own nationalism on our country they created in us, through action and reaction, a kind of nationalism, which, however genuine in the political sphere has often led to a very unhealthy chauvinism in art matters. As, however, we are not in political subjection any longer, it is time that we began to cultivate 'the free mind' through which alone we can look at such things as works of art without 'reacting' to the contempt of outsiders as we have tended to do in the past.

But, of course, we can only supply the necessary corrective to our present discussions if we first analyse the attitude of English, or rather European, nationalism towards Indian art in the past and study the reactions it caused among us.

As everyone knows, the first attitude of the English towards

us was one of great respect for the wealth of the Indies, admiration for the gold, the precious stones and the spices that abounded in our country. The address of Queen Elizabeth to Akbar, the Great Mughal, is couched in the most gracious and flattering language and the figure of the Indian prince in *Midsummer Night's Dream* symbolises this early attitude towards India. It was natural that at a period when the East India Company was seeking for privileges to trade in the realms of the legendary Great Mughals and while India still seemed from a distance to be one of the triumphant early civilisations of the world, that the general attitude of the English towards our culture should have been a generous one.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, however, there comes a subtle change from admiration to contempt. This is particularly obvious in the way in which the villain of the piece in a great many plays of the Restoration period is chosen from among Oriental potentates, especially the Indian Mughals. Ostensibly the Company was having a thin time in getting concessions from the Mughal court and the rumours of the autocratic behaviour of Oriental despots had begun to travel abroad. Also, these potentates afforded the Restoration dramatists good cover for blackguarding the court in whitehall. Be that as it may, the denigration of these monarchs also led to an under-valuation of Indian culture.

In the 18th century the pendulum of appreciation and depreciation swings up and down. When the agents of John Company are having their own way the following period is full of encomiums for the ancient wisdom of the Hindus, their great art and literature. But when they meet reverses in their intrigues among the various native princes, whom they were at this time concerned to embroil in local wars against each other in order to get a foothold for themselves, the writing of the period reflects hatred for things Indian.

Of course, there are not wanting independent Englishmen who record what they see and who applaud the old culture of India even though they despise the contemporary. There is the example of Warren Hastings who, in spite of the dastardly political role he played in India, was instrumental in getting the *Bhagavad Gita* into the hands of William Blake and in influencing Sir William Jones' translation of *Sakuntala*. And there was a spate of literature produced by the more honest servants of John

Company, and the fair minded English friends of India and by travellers, which was sympathetic to the beauties and glories of this country. The thirteen cartoons by Thomas Rowlandson illustrating a narrative called *The Adventures of Qoi Hai*, are a masterly series which, by satirising 'the Nabobs', show by implication the values of the culture the company were destroying.

The 19th century witnesses the same phenomena of alternating blame and praise as the 18th. Only, opinions were now sharply divided, as became evident in the controversy about Indian education between Macaulay, the Westernist, who thought that the bulk of 'Sanskrit, and Arabic literatures was only fit for the rubbish bin' and the English Orientalists who had such deep respect for ancient Hindu and Muhammadan learning that they wanted it to be the basis of teaching in the Indian schools and universities. Of course, the Westernists won the day but it must not be forgotten that the isolated Orientalists carried on the great tradition of scholarship set by Sir William Jones, Horace Hayman Wilson, Sir John Malcolm, Mount Stuart Elphinstone. And, since then, Colebrooke, Lyall, Cowell, Max Muller, Edwin Arnold and a host of other honoured names have spread the knowledge of India's culture in the academies and universities of Europe and America.

The general attitude of the British public, however, was considerably influenced by the horrors of the mutiny of which Britain had received only one-sided accounts. Even so celebrated a critic as Ruskin spoke ill of Indian art, because of the bias engendered by the happenings at Lucknow and Cawnpore. And though there was much talk of 'forgive and forget' after the declaration of Queen Victoria on the transference of power from the company to the Crown, the mood of the period had been set by the bitter memories of 1857. Also, this was the age in which the industrial revolution was maturing, and when England, the importer of textiles and calicoes from India, prohibited these imports by law and became the exporter of finished cloth in return for raw materials, our countryside, which was until then the producer of the finest muslins, the loveliest brocades and the most exquisite silks, the fame of whose craftsmen had spread all over the world, was bleached with the bones of our weavers and handloom spinners, and the two thousand year

tradition of craftsmanship was broken, never to be mended again till almost a century later when Mahatma Gandhi led the movement for Swadeshi homespuns.

Mr. K. de B. Codrington, perhaps the most brilliant English critic of Indian art now writing, while tracing the history of this period with a fairness and liberality which is to be commended, however pleads that there is no need to revive cynical jibes as to the mechanism of commercial exploitation. But surely no historical interpretation can ignore the economic curve, which, though unnoticed by the average consumer of culture, is yet to so large an extent the basic determinant of fashion and artistic taste. And it is poor consolation for starving India to know that samples of its beautiful textiles were adequately labelled and preserved in museums and written about with discrimination when commercial exploitation destroyed the handicraft industry which produced them and took them out of the daily use of India's inhabitants, and when the profit motive of the exploiters refused to allow a new machine industry to grow up in the place of the old craft.

It is no use deleting the facts of history in order to compel a change of heart. Rather is it necessary, as Freud would say, to acknowledge the sources of one's unconscious guilt in order to expiate it. And it is particularly important at a time when all national and racial frontiers have luckily tended to break down, at least among the younger intellectuals of the world, for us not to refuse to analyse the mentality of our prejudiced elders if we want to understand the psychology of conflict. It is no use burking the fact that Britain and India have been politically and economically at loggerheads for several generations now, as the conqueror and the conquered are bound to be at loggerheads with each other. And it is inevitable that the general attitude of the ruling race towards the art and culture of the ruled should have been at its best a patronising one and at its worst hostile and contemptuous. This is not to say that there were not notable exceptions to the general attitude, for a certain number of independents like Sir Thomas Munro and Professor Max Muller had the courage to go against the current 19th century opinion. But they were lone voices among the smug, church-going but mammon-worshipping bourgeoisie of Britain of that time, whose only

concession to Indian art were the cheap and vulgar models of the Taj Mahal, a kind of sentimental fetish which was to become a symbol of the death-wish of Anglo-India as well as of the English lower middle class. The intensification of Church Mission propaganda in Britain to raise money through charity bazaars for the conversion of the heathen popularised a religious terminology akin to that current in the days of the crusades; and the technical words 'Savagery' and 'Civilisation', used in the new science of anthropology were taken over by Victorian journalists and paraphrased as in Kipling's 'lesser breeds beyond the law'. The outer crust of the three-dimensional material universe was accepted as a norm and an insular, self-complacent middle class nationalism which paid lip-service to the Greek and Roman ideals in art and literature condescendingly dismissed foreigners and subject peoples as 'dagoes' and 'wogs'.

Sir George Birdwood in his *Industrial Arts of India*, published in 1880, wrote that 'the monstrous shapes of the Puranic deities are unsuitable for the higher forms of artistic representation; and this is possibly why sculpture and painting are unknown as fine arts in India'. B. H. Baden-Powell went one better and roundly declared that 'in a country like this we must not expect to find anything that appeals to mind or deep feeling'. And Christian missionaries frequently warned the public against the gods of the Hindu pantheon by dubbing their sculptured images as 'hideous deities with animals' heads and innumerable arms'.

Nor was this kind of prejudice prevalent only among the laymen, but so respectable and conscientious a historian and critic as Vincent Smith declared that 'after 300 A. D. Indian sculpture properly so called hardly deserves to be reckoned as art. The figures both of men and animals become stiff and formal, and the idea of power is clumsily expressed by the multiplication of members. The many-headed, many-armed gods and goddesses whose images crowd the walls and roofs of mediaeval temples have no pretensions to beauty, and are frequently hideous and grotesque'.

This kind of vilification continued into the early years of the 20th century. In 1910 Birdwood referred to a Buddha image in his lecture to the Royal Society: 'this senseless similitude, by its immemorial fixed pose, is nothing more than an inspired

brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose to its thumbs, knees and toes. A boiled suet pudding could serve equally well as a symbol of passionate purity and serenity of soul.'

Actually, the image Birdwood had in mind was, as Codrington has pointed out, a late Javanese Buddhist stone sculpture and not Hindu. And there was a timely protest against this, and similar views which had been current, in a letter sent to the *Times* under the joint signatures of Laurence Housman, Walter Crane, W. R. Lethaby and William Rothenstein. 'We...find in the best art of India', they said, 'a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people and of their deepest thought, on the subject of the divine... We trust that (the school of National Art in that country) will zealously preserve the individual character which is the outgrowth of the history and physical conditions of the country as well as of those ancient and profound religious conceptions which are the glory of India and of all the Eastern world'. This historic letter led to the foundation of the India Society for the study of Indian art and literature. And more and more the radical and independent opinion of practising artists and art critics began to rebut the prevalent stupidity and analyse the actual content of Indian sculpture and painting. And there became visible from within India itself certain efforts to evaluate the past heritage in the arts, notable among which were the works of E. B. Havell and Ananda Coomaraswamy.

Mr. Havell, the Principal of the Government School of Art in Calcutta, had found on arrival that Bengali art students were being given under the then current curriculum of the Education Department, Greek and Italian models to copy for training the hand and the eye. The irony of the situation, where a tradition completely alien to the minds of the students was being badly fostered while the great indigenous art lay ignored, except by the staff of the Archaeological Survey of India, stung his generous soul to the quick. He gathered a number of Bengali friends like Abanindranath Tagore around him and began to encourage a love of Indian art, and knowledge of it, among the students and the cultured public. Besides, he brought to bear an artist's knowledge of art and wrote a number of books on Indian painting, sculpture, architecture and other allied subjects and campaigned for many years in India and Europe for the recognition of Indian art works and the ideals which lay behind them.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, a Singhalese on his father's side and a Western European on his mother's side, was similarly struck by the general British contempt for Indian art, and, though a geologist by training, gave up his scientific research to devote himself entirely to the uplift of Indian culture. He gathered together one of the finest collections of Indian paintings and sculptures in the world and, after serving in the Colombo Museum, carried on independent research in England with a sensibility which is rare because it was guided by a profound scholarship. Coomaraswamy wrote some of the most exquisite criticism of Indian art both before and after he became Curator of the Asiatic Section of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in the U.S.A.

All students of Indian culture owe a deep debt to these stalwarts for their pioneer researches. For, between them, they built up detailed surveys of the surviving monuments of our art and supplied commentary by way of explanation on the social, religious and philosophical conceptions underlying it. The life work of both these scholars, however, coincided with the emergence of the Indian renaissance and the political ferment which is associated with Congress nationalism. As was to be expected, therefore, their writing was considerably influenced by the current nationalism and tended to become an idealistic expression of the revivalist aims of the Indian middle class leadership. Mr. Havell was inclined to theosophy and actually wrote a *History of Aryan Rule in India* to prove that in the ancient *Vedas* and *Upanishads* Aryan culture had set the pattern for all Indian and world development forever. And Dr. Coomaraswamy was so far persuaded of the beauty of everything Indian that he even defended caste and the barbaric custom of *Suttee* or widow-burning.

Those of us, who were born in the days of contempt in British-Indian relations, and have felt the searing blast of imperialist suppression, as well as suffered from the disabilities and frustrations which the English dominated system of education in India bequeathed to us, can well understand the kind of defensiveness among our countrymen and our sympathisers which justified even the worst aspects of our Indian inheritance. But we who have now emerged into a new era can neither condone the open and insidious denigration of our culture by the ruling race, nor emphasise the chauvinist special pleading of our own friends.

We have to evolve a positive aesthetic which ignores the patronage implicit in Anglo-Indian criticism and which is not a rationalisation of our own defensiveness against alien opinion.

For, apart from the extremes to which our elders were pushed, a certain tendentiousness entered even their genuine appreciation of Indian art. In order to defend images with many arms, for instance, they merely explained the religious and doctrinal reasons why these statues had multiple limbs. Thus they tended to ignore the plastic qualities of these art works, the *profound sense of form* which is ever present in the best works of art in our long tradition. The result of this has been to make our criticism more ideological explanation than real appreciation and the direction taken by our contemporary art under the impulse of this criticism has been so far literary as often to deprive it of any artistic significance whatever.

But what exactly are the kind of considerations which should go to make an adequate aesthetic for the enjoyment of Indian art and for its future development?

There is no denying, of course, that architecture, sculpture and painting were from times immemorial the handmaidens of a transcendental religion in India. But though the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses was evolved from concepts of a Reality supposedly inexpressible except through intuition, it is yet sought to be expressed through sensuous imagery. So that the symbols employed in Indian art have a meaning both for the Hindus as well as for those who understand the language of art. Since, however, the conception of Fine Art as distinct from the other arts is only a comparatively recent innovation and did not subsist in the minds of the makers of the early Indian art tradition, we have, of course, no right to apply the arbitrary criterion of Western art criticism to an art born under totally different conditions. Criticism must be internal if it is to be adequate.

But the religious and philosophical ideas in the service of which the artistic tradition of India flourished are not enough to go by in the understanding of Indian art. They are only the background of these art works, the symbology. Whereas we also have the symbols themselves, the art works, to the making of which have gone the technical skill of generations of artists who

lived together in craft guilds but brought individual sensibilities to bear on their tasks, which make one statue different from the other.

A synthesis of the world of thought which is behind Indian art and sensitive appreciation of the sense of form evident in the best works is then necessary, provided, that the intellectual or doctrinal content is not overestimated as it is by Dr. Coomaraswamy when he says that the object of art is 'primarily to communicate a gnosis'.

Of course, Dr. Coomaraswamy's emphasis derives from his reliance on the abstract statements contained in the scholastic writing of philosophers like Sanaracharya (8th century), who said that even the misshapen image of a god is to be preferred to an image of a man, howsoever excellent! This dependence on Vedantic commentators shifts the emphasis from the actual art of the many centuries to the later Brahminical codes and compilations explaining the art. And that leads to a fatal misunderstanding of the beautiful works in stone or paint which seem always to have been wrought by men who were open to the sensations of the world about them. For what do the figures in the lovely carvings of Sanchi and Bharhut indicate if not the love of life and exaltation of the senses in the gayest moods? And what is behind those tree spirits and snake gods and demons and spirits and men and women, who are grouped around in the most intricate compositions on the reliefs and panels? Surely there are intimations here of a humanism which is rooted in the imaginations of the men of the soil, there are echoes here of a life of feeling from which all art takes its actual impulse, however it may be transformed and shaped by the intellect. And it is only when the heiratic conventions begin to be rigidly enforced, when it is ordained that an image made according to the rule of the Brahmins alone is beautiful, that the vitality seems to go out of our art.

'When art becomes consciously symbolical', says Professor Herbert Read in answer to a number of neo-brahmin dictums laid down by Dr. Coomaraswamy in his book, *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* 'as it did in Christian art, and in Indian art, it begins to decay. The trouble about the intelligence is that it is "over-

weening", it considers itself self-sufficient, and assumes that its own instruments or reasonings are effective in communication. But in fact they are not so effective as the instruments of sensation. It is all very well to dismiss sensation as "an animal property" and to exalt knowledge as "distinctly human" and therefore to conclude that art, as a department of the "higher things of life", must have much more to do with knowledge than with feeling. But man is also an animal, and "the higher things of life" have not suddenly intruded into the process of evolution, but have come as a progressive refinement of sensation and feeling. And these faculties still remain the test of reality, in art as in human relations'.

In fact if we have to evolve an adequate aesthetic, both to understand the old art of India and to breathe new life into the contemporary moribund tradition, it is on this essential humanism, which has persisted in various forms in the folk culture of India, that we have to base ourselves. For in the long centuries of the past, as now, the common denominator of all values, in spite of all the spell-binding of the priesthood, was the culture of the village folk, of the men and women who sang as they ploughed the land and danced as they gathered in the harvests, and in whose lives the skill of the hand mingled freely with melody, rhythm and fantasy, whose imagination was, as it is today, mainly visual, and who appeased the dread deities built out of their own inner fears by tracing magical drawings outside their houses and welcomed the gods by painting the thresholds. And it is in the heart-beats of these people that we can trace the rhythm that is in their poetry, it is through the pleasurable and painful excitements of their lives that we can realise the excitement of their music and dance; it is in the coordination of their great skill with the intense moments of their lives to which we can trace their art. And if their songs and dances and paintings and sculptures are spiritual it is because they are the expression of their life, the control by the inner world of the outer, the synthesis of the undertones and overtones of experience lit by the spark of the human imagination.

Always what is alive in the art of India is this vital element, the impulse to stimulate and control the life process, to make life

really human, to breathe into its stagnant waters the ripple of some movement whether it is a sigh, a smile or an exclamation.

And it is this movement, which when realised by the hand of the artist in form or colour, has its own sense of rhythm, its own harmony or inner coherence, and which constitutes the real language of art, part of the universal language of art, its world symbology, and which any one who has eyes to see can understand whether he is a Western European, a Chinese, a Russian or an Indian. A knowledge of the hieratic symbolism which is behind Indian classical dancing, for instance, may help, but ignorance of it is not a very great hindrance to the direct response of the visual imagination to the lovely lotuses formed by the hand of an Indian dancer or the arabesques into which his body weaves and unweaves itself.

And it is the universalism of this direct response of the eye to form in a work of art that has today rendered possible a continuity of culture from one end of the world to the other, that has created an internationalism through which it is possible for a Bengali artist like the late Gogendranath Tagore to understand Picasso and the Cubists and for the English sculptor Henry Moore to absorb Negro sculpture. It is true that the internationalism of art is not yet so widespread as that of science, but in those metropolises of the world where there are adequate museums, with collections gathered from the main art traditions of the world, it would be found that, specially among artists, there is a growing understanding of different techniques and much cosmopolitan appreciation. So that the frontiers erected by politicians tend to break down wherever works of art have become freely visible.

Of course, this is not true about our own country. Not only is there not a single museum in India where the world arts are represented, but all those conditions have unfortunately prevailed here which make for self-consciousness in cultural matters and which breed chauvinism in art. And while we have seen the historical pattern and understood the reasons why this situation has arisen, we have to remedy the present state of affairs. For, we cannot be indifferent to the complete chaos of opinion and taste which exists in the art world of our country, the feeble imitation of ancient techniques, the spurious literariness, as well as the

vulgar representationism, which is creeping in with the inflow of Western commercial art.

But what is to be done?

Obviously, the first answer that comes to anyone's mind is education. But that only suggests a further question: What kind of education? For whom? And by whom? For, although E. B. Havell reformed the system under which Indian students were asked to copy Greek and Roman models in our art schools, he himself fell into a vicious circle when he enjoined his students to paint in the manner of Ajanta and Bagh. Because while under the first impulse of the discovery of the frescoes in the Buddhist caves our painters began to feel a certain enthusiasm, it was a spurious feeling in so far as it was essentially a form of revivalism. And as the group of painters who worked with Lady Herringam on the copies of Ajanta, became the most influential body of artists in India, some of them being appointed as heads of the art schools in the various provinces, the revivalist idea was sedulously spread all over the country. And what was already highly formalised in the gestures and poses of the figures of Ajanta (a school of art which had flourished at the end of a period rather than at the beginning) became in the hands of our contemporary art masters and their pupils a series of sterile stylisations, elongated fingernails and arched eye-brows. Besides, the bookish element in the Bengali renaissance gave these painters a literary bias, so that their content generally remained illustrative, and experiments in colour and form as such were precluded by the demands of prevailing taste. The two Tagore brothers, Abanindranath and Gogendranath escaped to an extent from the meretriciousness of this revivalism. And that was because they had looked at life a little more directly and studied the techniques of the Far-Eastern and Western European artists. Later, Jamini Roy and Amrita Sher-Gil brought vitality to their work, the former by exploring the colours and forms of the surviving folk art of Bengal as well as of Van Gogh; and the latter by synthesising all the elements of her European education with her reactions to the Indian landscape that she loved. And Rabindranath Tagore in his old age experimented with linear rhythm and produced a series of interesting sketches and water-colours, truly primitive in feeling. Today the young

band of artists of the Calcutta group are experimenting boldly with the new forms with awakened modern eyes. But, apart from these the bulk of the art activity in India for the last quarter of a century, sponsored by those whose avowed aim is to usher a revival of the Gupta or Magadha or Mughal periods, has resulted in paintings which look like the feeblest copies of each other, because they repeat the old and dead formulas *ad nauseum* in pretty, pretty pictures about Puranic deities, only a shade above the aesthetic level of Raja Ravi Verma's sickly oleographs. European influence, though consciously rejected is unconsciously assimilated by way of the dirty picture post card, so that lifeless breasts and vapoury pudenda are left discreetly veiled in silken sequins in order obviously to titillate the whole sex-repressed Indian nation at the same time as to preserve Shastric decorum and respectability. And the aura of a neo-Brahmin and neo-Sufi mysticism is spread over all by means of a bilious colour wash and sentimental thematic emphasis...As this revivalism informs all the schools of the country, the whole art education of India is poisoned at the source.

The crisis in art education is not confined to India alone, of course. It is not infrequent to come across people in all parts of the world who say in a tone of mock-humility: 'I don't know anything very much about art. But, really, *really* must we have all this ugliness about—look at Epstein's *Day and Night*! And there are even quite serious, but conventionally minded artists, schooled to copying nature, who assert that none of the advance-guard artists know how to draw. And I remember at least one politician with liberal sympathies, who held a Picasso picture upside down and began to auction it for a charity with the mock-humorous phrase: 'I don't know which way it should hang, but I know that the artist who painted it should hang—except that he may be exonerated for helping our fund'. Public taste has been so far corrupted by the education given in the schools and the universities of the world that art has come to be 'a queer thing'. Just let any young person announce to his parents that he wants to be an artist and in nine cases out of ten the loving father and mother will consider that their child has gone mad. And at the most they will concede that he should become a commercial artist. And then the young person will go

about pursuing his inspiration in an attic, underfed and humiliated at every turn, until society gets him and he becomes a hack for turning out cheap posters to advertise Bovril or Maclean's tooth paste.

As, in spite of the great freedom movement in our country, we have remained in our minds provincials of Western Europe; we have tended to take on the philistinism and vulgarity of the West without sorting out the ideals we have imported. Our education system, once a forcible imposition on us by the West is still, under our national regime, a compromise between a third-rate imitation of the English system and Gandhiji's, 'earn while you learn' child-serf idea. And, nowhere in the new schemes, except in Zakir Hussain's, or Sargent's, does one feel that the aim of education has been conceived on the basis that every man and woman is potentially a special kind of artist and that the real aim of education is not classrooms and syllabuses but freedom, the real freedom which comes from the 'free mind', the mind whose fears, hates, guilts and anxieties are released, so that the dynamic energy latent in the person expresses itself creatively, through pleasurable acts and movements. Until we begin to rear our children from the very earliest age by conceding that childhood is playhood and not a business of categorical imperatives, until we get into the habit of tracking down the inner motives of a child and not the ulterior motives, we shall not be building a nation of free men but 'generations of vipers' whose suppressions will bring their own nemesis in hatred and war. But in order to evolve a wholesome educational system we have to drop the catchwords and slogans of the platform and set up bodies of experts to analyse the new methods of education which have been propounded by people like Tagore, Bertrand Russell, A. S. Neil, Maria Montessori, Herbert Read and the Soviet intelligentsia. The outcome of such research will be to stimulate an appreciation of our great life concepts, a fundamental awareness of our human needs. And the emergence of our life concepts will in their turn reveal the real function of art in a modern community by revealing that it is the core of all civilised living, the warp and woof of human existence and not a mere luxury.

If there is to be any nationalism about our art, then it will not be political nationalism, but the bias of our environment.

For although the aeroplane and television have already reduced distances, so that any place in the world is only a day's ride from the other, it will be found that if not in science, which is more or less international, literature and art will tend to be rooted in the sense of locality, in so far as language is kinetic and goes to make every dialect uniquely different from another, and the visual imagination is more intensely active before adolescence, and colours and forms felt during childhood in one landscape affect a person's style permanently. As, however, differences in style give to the literary and artistic works of different parts of the world their peculiar charm, there is no need to iron out the local sense in the interests of a superficial cosmopolitanism. It may, indeed, be necessary to feed the imagination of students upon those monuments of the culture of their countries or regions which are the distinctive heritage of those places. With the mother tongue, and its daily idiom, the child must be given the myths, the legends, the folk tales, the folk songs and folk dances of its birthplace. And then it must be encouraged to get to know the culture of other places through a new kind of encyclopaedia written by the nationals of each country, as far as possible without bias or contempt. The museums of the world must resort to new techniques through which the books and pictures and other works of art of the world can be seen by more people and with greater discrimination. In this way the artists of the future may emerge, strongly individual in inspiration and yet cosmopolitan in technique, and we may be saved from that vague 'national spirit' which covers so many sins in art even as it growingly hides so many sores in the body politic of the various aggressive states of the world.

When we realise that the emergence of a great new art tradition in our country is contingent upon the evolution of great life concepts (and what could be greater life concepts than those which emerge when we see our lowly and down-trodden humans), it may be possible for us to talk of art with some degree of honesty. At the moment all our boasting about the past is largely a compensation for our paucities in the present, and all our partisan quarrels are a series of vicious circles, within bigger vicious circles. Are we honest enough to bring some degree of objectivity to the study of Indian Art?

THREE CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS.

I. Jamini Roy*

To Sudhindra Datta

(1)

I think there are few countries of the world where the position of art in its relations to the artist, to the community, to science, religion, politics and other departments of life is being more eagerly reevaluated than in contemporary India. All these conferences, symposiums, art-annuals and prolonged discussions (often very wearisome, sentimental, muddled and boring) bear witness to the fact that we are involved in a 'complex' which must be analysed clearly before we can go any further in producing art-works. For we are heirs, in the realm of art, as in other fields, to vast accumulations, ranging from the great ancient and mediaeval tradition, which ended with the disruption of the Mughal Empire, to the age-old folk tradition which broke down under the 18th and 19th century European influence. Until the forces of 'civilisation' imposed themselves like a thin veneer on our lives, the ritualistic needs of Indian village society had kept the arts close to most people. But with the growth of new groups and patterns the old crafts have been increasingly destroyed, until they remain a survival from which the new integration can arise only if certain basic questions are asked. For instance, we have to analyse the creative process itself and see how an individual artist integrates by gathering together certain split off parts of his own nature, and of his audience, in a work of art. Also, we must see how far a particular work is the expression of the personal unconscious of the artist, that is to say, of his psychological type, and to what extent, given the spark of genius, the similarity of background and development of the artist and his public is responsible for that authentic utterance which strikes a note in various layers of society and is acclaimed a masterpiece. And there are a host of other questions: what is the true basis of an artist's inspiration, of his technique and influence? How much does a particular style owe to the structure of the community of which he is a part? And if the existing, social and aesthetic relations are inadequate, how can they be changed, if

1. Article-review of the monograph on Jamini Roy by Bishnu Dey and John Irwin Indian Society of Oriental Art. Rs. 10.

at all?...All these considerations arise when one addresses oneself to a review of the art of Jamini Roy, certainly one of the few important painters in India today. For, if he has not himself self-consciously asked such questions, he has at least solved some of them in the only way in which a painter can—through paint. So that his work mirrors not only all the current conflicts in India, but marks the turning point of a completely new epoch of development.

(2)

It was at the house of one of his earliest friends, the poet Sudhindra Datta, that I first met Jamini Roy. A somewhat stocky figure in homespun, with a kindly, well-moulded round face, crowned by greying hair, and with mellow Bengali eyes, he seemed so simple, unassuming and unostentatious to me and such a refreshing change from some of the frustrated, attitudinising artists and writers of cosmopolitan, dirty Calcutta.

After showing us some canvases which he hoped to include in the then impending 1938 exhibition of his work in British Indian Street, Jamini Roy went away. Catching the enraptured look in my eyes, Sudhin told me a few facts about the artist's life. Apparently, Jamini, the scion of a small landlord family from a village in Eastern Bengal, had been trained in the current tradition of the Calcutta School of Art, a once vigorous movement based on the revival of the motifs of the frescoes of Ajanta and Bagh. But he had become dissatisfied with the spurious elongation of eyebrows and fingernails which was increasingly sentimentalising the productions of this school, and was reaching out to new forms.

For a time he became a 'fashionable' painter, then he fell under the influence of Vincent Van Gogh and such European painters as he saw in reproductions. One fine morning, however, he deliberately cut himself adrift from all this and went back to the survivals of the folk tradition in his village. And he evolved that extraordinarily rich, sensuous and musical art which some of his critics have called a 'modern primitivism'.

(3)

What exactly is meant by primitivism? It is obvious that it does not mean 'going native', as some even of the most celebrated

artists between the two world wars thought it to mean when they began to copy negro sculpture and Javanese masks. For 'primitive art', in its African and other folk forms, is neither technically nor emotionally simple. The scientific use of the word 'primitive' denotes a condition of the imagination when the unknown potentialities of nature or man, the fates, arouse fears and dreads, appeased by the offering of prayers and the evolution of magical formulas. Since the twentieth century, man has not, over the bulk of the world, travelled far from this condition, in spite of his much vaunted 'civilisation', and it is natural for many artists, in full view of the terrors and hallucinations of the European jungle, to try to soak themselves in the influence of the 'pre-logical' survivals of the earliest art of the world. The difficulties of achieving those changes which make an infant into a self-aware man have naturally also tended to make the magic of the child's view of life more important as a new starting point in modern art.

But though at a superficial glance the return of a middle-class Bengali artist from the world of 'fashionable' painting to the folk tradition would seem like 'primitivism', in the above sense, Messrs. Bishnu Dey and John Irwin are right in explaining the peculiar difference between the return of some contemporary European painters to the Altamira caves and Jamini Roy's return to the folk tradition of his country: 'The important point to recognise,' they say, 'is that he approached folk art not as an outsider, but as one who had an intimate knowledge and understanding of the living experiences of the people where lay the roots of the folk culture itself.' Again: 'Jamini Roy never had to pursue Gaugin's far-away search for equivalence and symbolism, nor was it necessary for him to study the paintings of Matisse in order to develop an 'integral vision'. For he was going back to the cohesive and comprehensive culture of his inheritance, accepting its myths and legends, basic forms and primary colours as a birthright.

At the same time, however, it must be admitted, as these critics indeed admit, that Jamini Roy had to wage his own peculiar struggle, because he was not content merely to copy the level surfaces, the flattening out of design in depth, etc. or to revive folk painting, but to create a new, forward art from the elements of the somewhat damaged village tradition. The breakdown of the

'feudal' system in India, and the artificial as well as natural obstacles in the way of a modern synthesis makes the transformation extremely difficult. For, on the one hand, the self-conscious artist has to retain the quick of the ancient magician, and, on the other hand, he has to avail himself of the fruits of scientific knowledge. And because of the clash of the several surviving layers of civilisation in India, the attempt at the communication of one's vision by mastering the fantastic nightmare of hunger, cruelty, oppression, pain and psychological disorders, becomes a heroic struggle against all kinds of doubts and hesitations, especially in pictorial art, which has an indirect, subtler and deeper connection with immediate local realities than science or even the written word.

The pertinacity of instinct, then, with which Jamini Roy went back to the sources of primordial inspiration in the village would not alone have qualified him for respectful attention; for, often, the attitude towards an unknown art can become the sheerest sentimentalism. It was rather his discovery of the truth that much excellence lies in inheritance, as in the conquest of environment, and that the artist *transforms* his material. The ordeal which he went through to reach the point of concentration amid the many strains that were intertwined in his middle-class experience by focussing his attention on everything in contemporary India, simultaneously, makes him uniquely important.

(4)

Let us see what are the characteristic elements of the Bengali folk tradition. The old folk culture is an amalgam of two main streams, the anthropomorphic beliefs of the Dravidians, the original neolithic inhabitants of India, and the more abstract poetising of the Aryans, the earliest invaders. As in most conquests, the conquered culture took its revenge on the conqueror. So that the indigenous nature myths and the dark magical cults, with their pantheon of tree spirits, snake gods, fauns, nereids and ghosts, thoroughly infused the invading strain. But it was not until after the decay of the classical court culture and the emergence of the humanistic revolt of the Buddha that the slow, intricate folk practices became the predominating culture. The decay of central authority and the disruption of

Vedic religion through the contentions of the schools was aided by the dynamic undercurrents from the village republics, and thus arose the three great mediaeval forms of Hinduism—the worship of Vishnu, God as the Blessed One, in Northern India; the worship of Shiva, God as creator, preserver and destroyer, in South India; the worship of Sakti, God as Mother, in Eastern India. The last of these schools of religion was the main source of those weird Yogic practices which Sir John Woodroffe has described in several volumes of translations of *Tantric Texts*, embodying the apocalyptic philosophy of the Iron Age and enclosing a psychology of ritualistic worship which was to be the main source of the continuous folk art of Bengal. Ecstatic dancing, the rhythms of music and song, river worship, snake worship, the various cults of the Mother Goddess—are all evidence of the insidious triumph of folk imagination over the orthodox mind. Bankura District, where Jamini Roy was born, shows the process of revolt and assimilation more intensely than many others in Bengal. His village of Beliatore still retained, even in our own age of railways and motors, its self-sufficient mediaeval economy. Group life was closely knit together by communal ritual and immune from contact with the outside world.

(5)

There is a phrase of Aeschylus which very aptly describes the attitude of the artisan in such a landscape: 'The eye of the soul is bright in sleeping and dark in waking.' Certainly, the village craftsman is not a self-conscious artist. He fulfils his function in the community by drawing upon folk imagination and expressing the communal taste for age old primary colours and designs, the conventional forms in making things for daily use, such as pots, pans, toys, printed fabrics, scrolls, ritualistic images etc.

Jamini Roy had seen the skilled men of his village at work in his childhood. And, ostensibly, the instinctive love of the child to potter about, in spite of social and class taboo, led him to copy their motifs and patterns early. His father, perceiving the boy's predilection, had done what was befitting the status and prestige of a small landlord—sent Jamini Roy to the Government School of Art in Calcutta. When, after about thirty years of the imbecile curriculum and European fashions, he 'returned' to the folk tradition, it was, therefore, not difficult for him to regain

the sense of awareness which inspires the devotees in a family who collaborate on certain festivals to draw one line each in the collective picture called the 'Pat' drawing; and he sought out the myths of the *Bhakti* (love as devotion) cult.

On the surface, this attempt at a departure from the stultifying rules of the art school is reminiscent of Matisse and Derain. But, under Indian conditions it was, as has been said before, tantamount to a revolution. For Jamini Roy restored to the picture not only the state of mind of the indigenous artisan, but he consciously revived that respect for the quality of line which is an Indian speciality, the result perhaps of centuries of effort to attain rhythm, almost as though it were a spiritual exercise. Organisation, balance, proportion—these too accrued to him from the folk tradition. But he transformed them as only a forward looking emotive scientist could have done by bringing out the primary characteristics of the figure and formalising the less important features.

No doubt, as Professor Shahid Suhrawardy suggested in his pioneer essay on Jamini Roy, his training in European techniques helped him greatly. For instance, his departure from the straight line to the curvilinear may have been influenced by what he saw of the French contemporaries; and he certainly learnt to experiment in the penetration of light into the texture of a painting, from the Europeans. But the synthesis he carried out is significant for his nearness to the basic Indian tradition and his transformation of it into a new style. The sure economy and restraint with which he gets a picture in two or three strokes shows as though he is a medium possessed by the singleminded vision of the 'Pat' draughtsman and yet in alliance with the mood of the most genuine elements in world art.

It is perhaps for this reason that one is particularly impressed by most of his preparatory drawings and sketches. But those who remember the 1938 Calcutta exhibition of Jamini Roy's work will see in his painting a development which now seems to have achieved several phases. Messrs. Bishnu Dey and John Irwin have not reproduced many examples of the early period. Therefore, I would like to press the claims of one of the *Mother and Child* pictures in the collection of Humphrey House in the style with which Jamini Roy first startled us by getting away from the

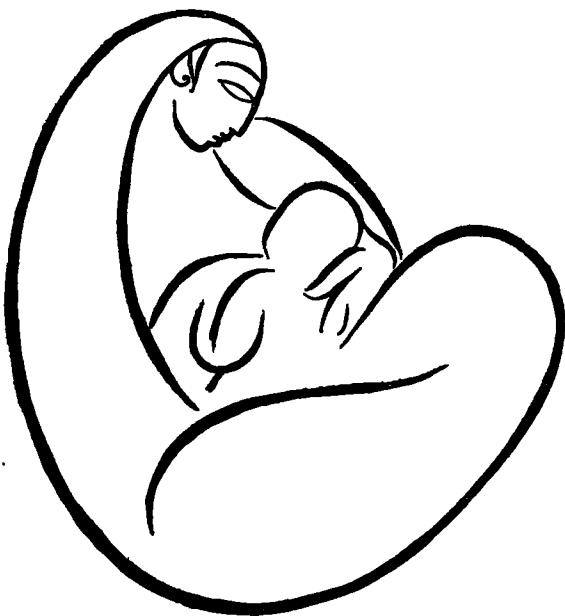
idiotic exuberance of the Calcutta art world. The tall panel called the *Peasant* showed the peculiar discrimination with which Jamini could select abstract characteristics and infuse in painting the strength of simplicity by an appropriate handling of home made colours. The drama of compositions like the *Santal Dance* which was to develop in the later *Kirtan* pictures is the quint-essence of his magical genius, for here painting is approximating to music.

But it is not merely a new way of handling paint that distinguished Jamini Roy's work. In his satirical pictures and cartoons he was already, before the war, aware of the clash of social forces: money-lenders and landlords, with the heads of beasts of prey, were symbolic of the emerging peasant struggles, as the dream birds were haunted by the sense of malevolent spirits gathering on the horizon. And, apart from the child-like gaiety of the singing parties and the innocence of Virgins, there was the almost insane look of dazed horror in the highly formalised open eyes of most of his figures. The exaggerations of the toy style paintings were also used to show a crazy humour.

If I admit the bias of literary appreciation that enters this way of looking into pictures for some kind of message, there still seems in the development of Jamini Roy, from the paintings of village beasts, birds and flowers, through his comments on human beauty and dignity to his concentration on the life of Christ, a self-conscious attempt at asking the question: What has happened to us? Why are we so plagued? Where are we going?

Some academic person might say, of course, that Jamini Roy is seeking the peace of the abyss. But the artist denies that. 'Art', he says, 'is work of experience, of stress and strain, wrestling with problems, intellectual and physical.'

That is the nature of his approach to painting. At the best it is a search for value in the manner of a poet who asks: What is the true world behind the veil of words. But, always, it is a search for integral form, for a new kind of naive beauty which can yet reproduce the disorientated romanticism of our age.



Mother & Child

II. Amrita Sher-Gil *

To Syed Mahmuduzzafar

In the year 1913, in Budapest, was born a little girl, daughter of a Sikh aristocrat and scholar and an Hungarian aristocrat mother. After the war of 1914-18, at the age of eight, this child was brought to India by her parents and lived on the slopes of Summer Hill at Simla and in Saraya, a village in the Gorakhpur district of the U.P., where were situated the family estates. For a brief period in January 1924 the girl, who had shown artistic leanings, was taken to school in Florence but returned in the June of that very year. She lived at home till April 1929, when she went to study art in Paris. After five years' training, under Pierre Vaillant at the Grand Chaumiere and, later, under Lucien Simon at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, she returned to India in 1934. And from 1934 to 1941, when she died of a sudden illness, in seven short years, she painted a number of canvases which are, in the opinion of the few honest critics we have among us, some of the most important pictures painted by an Indian painter since the great Rajput schools of the eighteenth century lapsed and the art of painting fell into decay in our country.

Mr. Karl Khandalavala has recently brought out a beautiful book on the life work of Amrita Sher-Gil, with a commentary, consisting of a short biographical essay made up out of her letters to him, and a critical estimate of her experiments in colour and form. And, even for those who have seen little or nothing of her original work, she appears from this text, and the lovely reproductions of her paintings, to be unquestionably a genius of the first rank, one of the few Indian painters to give a new direction to the art of our country.

But, unfortunately, not all the fine analysis of Mr. Khandalavala, nor all the encomiums lavished on Amrita Sher-Gil's work by critics like Dr. Hermann Goetz or Mr. Eric Dickinson, seem to have convinced our philistines of her great accomplishments. Even her title to be an 'Indian' painter is questioned. And violent controversies rage when her name is mentioned.

* Article - review of a monograph on Amrita Sher-Gil by Karl Khandalavala. New Book Co.

How is one to restore some balance into criticism and estimate Amrita Sher-Gil's real contribution? How should one define her exact position?

If we take the last question first we may perhaps be able to get rid of the elementary problem of racial origin and be enabled to tackle the more complex question of her technique later.

It is obvious, of course, that the child of a mixed marriage between a Punjabi Sikh and a Hungarian lady is in a somewhat dubious position in the present world dominated by racial antagonisms. And yet as any census would determine the nationality of a child after the male parent, Amrita Sher-Gil passes the first formal test and can claim Indian nationality. And, stupid as one feels in having to press her claims in this way, it has to be further asserted that as she spent some of the formative years of her girlhood in India (and the years before adolescence are most important in the making of a painter in so far as the early visual images of colour and atmosphere are everlasting), her alliance with the Indian landscape was at least as integral as it was with her early background in Hungary and her later association with Paris.

But, actually, it is no use trying to prove Amrita Sher-Gil to be an Indian even though she deliberately chose, after her studies in Paris, to paint her major works in India. She may be described as a painter half a century ahead of her time, who synthesised the technique of the West with the influences of Indian environment and practised a style which is international. The shrinking of the physical world, through faster and faster aerial communication is likely soon to make for internationalism in such branches of human achievement as science, education, health and the plastic and the visual arts. While even literature, which depends for its beauty to a great extent on the local accent, will, at least in technique, tend to be cosmopolitan, however much it varies in verbal felicity. And though local sense, with all the force and vivacity it can create in language patterns, may always be valued in literature, this local sense will come to express itself in a rather more complex way in the arts, that is to say, through the development, by individuals of various nationalities, of unique styles out of all the constituent influences about them. In so far then as Amrita Sher-Gil was the precursor in India of this new

cosmopolitanism, there is no need for us to try and prove her to be specifically Indian or non-Indian. The point is rather to see what is her actual contribution and whether it is in the direction to which she led her painting that the visual and plastic arts will go or whether they will follow the effete, illustrative and sentimentally romantic tradition of so-called Modern Indian Art.

Now, in order to estimate her real contribution one has to see what she set out to do and how far she achieved it.

The fact that Amrita Sher-Gil went to an art school in Paris and stayed there, ostensibly practising life drawing, consistently for five years, shows that she made a conventional enough beginning. For everyone who knows anything about the training in an average art school in Western Europe knows that here drawing from the model and obvious construction are considered the most essential qualifications of an artist. A flower must look like a flower and figures reproduced in scale. The concrete object is exalted—and the feeling which this photographic and naturalistic representation is supposed to arouse is considered the supreme test. A painter who can draw men and women so that they look exactly like men and women generally wins the school medal or is hung in the academy. We are told that at the age of nineteen Amrita Sher-Gil was elected an Associate of the Grand Salon for a picture called 'Conversation'. But Mr. Khandalavala, who has seen her Paris sketch books, vouches for the fact that, apart from the usual tricks of the trade, she didn't learn much from her academic training.

It was 'the birth of an intense desire to return to India followed by a new-found understanding of Cezanne and Gaugin', that was to bring to fruition the young shoots of her sensibility. Added to these two important influences was the discovery of the great Indian tradition through constant visits to the Louvre and Musee Guimet.

Those of us who have had to correct the mistakes of our early education in the British-Indian universities, know how we rediscovered India through Europe. And we can well understand the processes of mind which went to mature the latent genius of Amrita Sher-Gil. She must have tingled with joy to see the lovely Mughal miniatures and Indian sculpture and to know of the respect in which the art works of India were held by the connois-

seurs and the practising artists of France. And the knowledge of how much the Japanese prints had meant to Monet and Manet and Whistler, of how the South Indian bronzes had impressed Rodin, and of the significance which Indian painting had for Matisse, Modigliani and Derain, must have filled her with pride in India's past. And it is easily conceivable how she began to think of India, the India that had belonged to her child's world, romantically, almost as Gaugin had thought of the South Sea islands. And, obviously, she wanted to return and apply the technique she had learnt in the studios of Paris to India, to come and paint her dream world with the 'objectivity' of Cezanne, who dominated her mind as he dominated the best part of the art world of Western Europe.

Thus in Paris she practised drawing and sought to learn the lesson of Cezanne, that by painting still life pictures and landscapes, in which one had to concentrate on objects with definite structures, one is able to realise the objective nature of things in terms of paint and canvas. And she understood his emphasis on the intimate relation between form and colour in nature, on the necessity of design in colour, that is to say of design not as a thing in itself but as a harmony of colour.

If Cezanne showed to Amrita Sher-Gil the way to the organisation of form, she took her initial cue for the organisation of colour from Gaugin. But, as Mr. Khandalavala has very pertinaciously pointed out, her affinity with Gaugin is superficial. For, actually, the broad planes of colour and the plastic effects which she tried to achieve in her canvases owe themselves to Cezanne's reduction of objects to their essential planes and to her own uncompromising quest for simplicity through her absorption of Western teaching as well as the lessons of early Indian sculpture and mediaeval Indian painting.

I have deliberately emphasised the fact that the artist, whom some of us claim to be a great pioneer of Indian art, originally learnt organisation of form and colour from Western Europe, because I believe that it is the synthesis of this principle with Indian passion and imagination which will create a new art in India. That Amrita Sher-Gil was one of the first artists of our country to recognise this, that she self-consciously wedded, as

Cezanne himself devoid of much inventive imagination was unable to do, the disciplined technique of painting to a humanist vision, places her among the initiators of a great new tradition in our country.

I can understand the meaning of the phrase which she uttered once: 'India belongs only to me'. For, soon after her arrival, as she walks among the sad faced but vivid humble men and women on the hills and the plains of our vast landscape, and puts them in her early canvases, she seems to be thrilled with the discovery that India is crying out to be painted, shrieking aloud for artistic interpretation by someone who could eschew the false romanticism of the Bengali wash drawing and look at it anew, afresh, with a resilient technique and a genuine tenderness.

'What is new or fresh in such an approach?' someone may ask. Precisely this that the romantic, idealistic or transcendental strain which has dominated the minds of our 20th century Indian painters is being held in check, and the adolescent literariness which attacks most young painters is given up in favour of experiments in the technique of painting as such, the organisation of colour and form and light, the relations of masses and planes, plasticity and rhythm.

As against many of the modern Indian painters who refused to look squarely at the life around them and merely stylised what they took from Ajanta and Bagh, Amrita Sher-Gil tried to give form to what she saw around her, under the impress of such works in the Indian tradition of sculpture and painting as are vital and instinct with dramatic power.

The first few paintings on which she worked in her studio in Simla show sculpturesque technique, both in the folds of the dresses and the severity of planes. The still, immobile figures in *Hill Men* and *Hill Women*, though almost static, are yet however essentially dramatic, because of the way in which they are related to each other in the composition. Already Amrita Sher-Gil is blending the skilled draughtsmanship she has learnt in Paris with a compassionate vision of the unhappy Indian people, with a strict avoidance of rhetoric or ornamentation, and she is gathering the uncontoured

forms before her, through the organisation of volume with colour, into a new kind of symmetry or balance. What seems like distortion or inadequate drawing in her pictures to some people is a coherence attained through inner feeling, a kind of metaphysical aim, the mastery of nature and its use by the artist to express deep emotion. And it is clear that few artists in contemporary India have handled colour with quite the passionate joy which Amrita Sher-Gil brought to it. And yet all these gay and bright colours are used to communicate the essential melancholy of this land and her inhabitants.

In *Group of Three Girls and Child Wife* the colours are even brighter and the resultant sadness more poignant. For a fiery, almost searingly angry, imagination is at work, an elemental vision armed with a palette and a brush that are like fire and sword. And the curious thing is that it is precisely by eschewing obvious literary aims and concentrating on the organisation of colour that Amrita has attained her imaginative aims.

This struggle to realise herself through paint dominated her and she remained an experimentalist throughout her young life, waging an uncompromising war against complacence, and straining to achieve greater control over her medium. In 1936 she made pilgrimages to the shrines of Indian art. She went first to see the wall paintings of Ajanta and the nearby temple of Ellora, hewn out of rock. Then she visited Travancore and Cochin and saw the magnificent murals of the Mattancheri Palace. Her impressions of these places are characteristic. Though finding Ajanta 'curiously subtle and fascinating' she thought the paintings 'too involved compositionally and the details of jewellery in particular feebly painted, badly constructed'. This reaction was natural from one who had made the clear organisation of form and colour her god. 'Simply extraordinary', she exclaimed. 'Dangerous stuff to take into the system unassimilated'. But when she met good construction in the frescoes of the Mattancheri Palace after having seen the paintings in the Padmanabhapuram temple in Travancore, she wrote to Karl Khendalalava: 'When I saw them I realised why I hadn't been colossally impressed by the ones at Travancore. I had a vague feeling that much more could be done with it than what had been done, that much greater possibilities lay in that material. And in Cochin I found the justification.



Unita Sher Gil in her 'c

for that feeling. I have seldom seen such powerful drawing. It often surpasses Ajanta'.

The charm and depth of the south worked on her, its rich, sensuous, intricate life with the bright colours of its flowers, the chiselled faces of its inhabitants and the grace of their garments, captivated her, until she wanted to stay and paint. She did actually settle down for a few days at Cape Comorin and executed the picture called *Fruit Vendors*, the first superb result of the pilgrimage to the Deccan and the lower reaches of the peninsula. For the new coherence of her draughtsmanship and brilliant colouring here seems to owe itself in part at least to Ajanta.

The harmony which is foreshadowed in the last named picture is more completely realised in the three monumental pictures which she painted on her return to Simla, and which she called her South Indian Trilogy, namely *The Bride's Toilet*, *The Brahma-charis* and *South Indian Villagers Going to Market*. All the elements of her make-up have here combined to render possible three of the most vital canvases which she was ever to paint in her brief life. The plastic essential to which she was always reducing her figures flows with a linear rhythm, itself completely one with her newly mixed colours and her profound sense of irony, the pity in her. And her grasp of objective truth seems to have been compelled by an intense, almost convalescent, tenderness almost like Dostoevsky's, and she seems near enough to achieving what Cezanne wanted to attain, in the manner of Poussin, poetic truth. 'As we gaze at *South Indian Villagers Going to Market* are we not meeting the very fatalism of India's malaise?' says Professor Dickinson. 'Here is gathered no happiness, no laughter, but a brooding melancholy seems to beckon at us as we note those attenuated frames of old and young. Out of their eyes comes too that mute reproach to the god of seasons and unyielding crops'.

The sheer strain of working on the South Indian Trilogy exhausted her. She had explored a new line of approach to her objectives in these pictures. So we find her now doing a series of small canvases, beginning with *Women in Red* and including *Siesta*, *The Story Teller*, *Ganesh Puja*, *Elephants Bathing in a Green Pool* and *Hill Scene*, before she left for Hungary in June 1938 to marry her cousin Dr. Victor Egan.

In this phase of her development Amrita Sher-Gil was obviously influenced by the Basholi paintings, which she knew well from Karl Khandalavala's collection and from the Lahore Museum, as well as by the Kangra Kalam and the Mughal miniatures. And colour is more intensely the hero of her work of this period than ever before. 'I cannot control my appetite for colour,' she said to her friend, 'and I wonder if I ever will.' About the particular way in which she used colour in these pictures she wrote: 'I have tried, though it is very difficult, to give all the figures...the flat relief (I am avoiding volume) of cardboard figurines pasted into canvas. And also of obtaining my effects of colour less by play of light and shade, though they are all open air things, than by the enamelled translucidity of the *Pate* itself'.

Although comparatively small, the canvases of this period are still in the mural tradition. And it is not surprising that she should choose to assimilate the intense colouring of Basholi with the Kangra designs, because the latter are mostly a reduced fresco style and not illustrative miniatures as Mughal paintings are generally. But whatever the influences which exerted themselves on her and whatever environment she chose to paint in, whether Simla or Saraya, Amrita Sher-Gil is concerned to make a synthesis. The blind, who are also malicious, if only with the malice of stupidity, cannot see the urge she had to give form to her observation of figures and landscapes and say that she merely copied Rajput and Mughal paintings on canvas. But anyone with eyes to see will appreciate the inimitable style she has created for herself, a manner as unique to her temperament as is the style of Nicholas Roerich.

During her visit abroad she painted some canvases in Hungary which, though in the European genre and not admitted by Mr. Khandalavala in the Indian canon, are to me extremely interesting, because they reveal an unerring sense of visual relatedness in the midst of a phenomena different from India and yet intimately connected both with Amrita's early childhood impressions and the preoccupation with paint which she derived from her Western inheritance.

The war broke out a little while after her return to India in July 1939. She painted very little in the atmosphere of uncertainty

which prevailed, except Resting, which Mr. Khandalavala rightly considers 'one of her finest achievements for its sheer colour beauty', with its gaily clad females, each a gentle flower among the natural flowers. But when Amrita settled down in the village of Saraya, where her husband was appointed Medical Officer at her uncle's sugar factory, she was conscious of a new phase in her work. 'Another period of transition is approaching. One of greater reflection, of more conscious painting, more observation and more stylisation in the sense of nature'.

And the various pictures she did at Saraya, do indeed prove her dictum in a curious way, proving also that she was a fairly good critic of her own work. Elephant Promenade, The Swing, Horse and Groom, Ancient Story Teller and Woman Resting on a Charboy, Haldi Grinders, and Camels show her experimenting with compositions more derivative from the Kangra and Mughal painting than any of her previous work, but there is a new brightness, a new precision and a new simplicity here, without the atmosphere of a sad, effin music, the hall mark of her tender sensibility.

'I can't waste time', she had cried incessantly during this period, as though the premonition of her impending death was deep in her. And yet she had relentlessly pursued her painting, exploring all kinds of ideal forms and colours and constructions, with a view to the new synthesis she had been intent on achieving between the canvas and India. In September 1941 she moved to Lahore with her husband and on the 5th of December she died of a sudden illness. What the accumulations and amalgams of this last period would have brought forth is an idle question to pose now. One can only say in the words of her friend and critic, Karl Khandalavala, that 'Amrita Sher-Gil's work is an outstanding legacy to Indian painting.'

III. Rabindranath Tagore.

To Svetsalov Roerich and Devika Rani Roerich

The paintings of Rabindranath Tagore are important if only because they show that every human being is potentially a special kind of artist. For here was a great poet who, after half a century's addiction to literature, suddenly in his seventies began to paint and draw, discovering to his own and other people's astonishment that his scribblings and scratches had a linear rhythm which was integral and pleasing to the eye.

There are some critics, however, who don't find anything very pleasing in Tagore's paintings. And they are inclined to think that the recognition his pictures have received was a kind of charitable concession made to a poet's paintings, just as critics often forgive an artist for having a wife and a mistress at the same time. The general public is also equally puzzled. For instance, I remember an acquaintance of mine who, when confronted with Tagore's drawings, said to me: 'What is there in these? My five-year-old child can draw like that!'

The critics apart, I feel that the frankly philistine amateur who made the last quoted remarks conceded the essence of the truth about Rabindranath's pictures: for, of course, a five year child can and does often draw exactly as did the old poet at seventy-two. And far from such drawing being execrable, it displays a spontaneous feeling and a rhythm which is often lacking in the more self-conscious art of grown-ups, who have learnt how to draw from life in the art school and are proud of being able to secure a likeness as near a photograph as possible. Even the most casual survey of a number of children's drawings will reveal in them an imaginative quality far in excess of the Academy portrait painter's art. But the inflated self-respect of most adults, prejudiced in favour of the superior wisdom and power of over twenty is always too shocked by such a revelation to admit beauty in a mere child's handiwork, and the mainsprings of artistic activity in the genuine vital feeling for rhythm is seldom understood adequately, thus leading to endless arid controversy in art matters.

Now what exactly do we mean by rhythm? Rhythm is a movement realised and controlled by an artist from the ordinary

stuff of life. Take, for example, the art of dancing where the rhythm of the body is more obviously noticeable than in the plastic arts. The peasant threshing, or the weaver woman walking up and down while she sorts the yarn, are not dancing. And yet both the peasant and the weaver woman at work perform certain movements from which a dancer selects his own movements and transforms them through his imagination, so that their various combinations and permutations are recreated in a form which has a life of its own, reminiscent of the raw material from which the impressions were originally taken. What has happened is that the dancer's inherent sense of form has ordered the chaotic expressions of the peasant or the weaver woman into a peculiar harmony. Perhaps the repressed desires of the dancer, latent, in his subconscious have helped to energise his artistic creation, but the performance makes a new whole, which is like the original reality and yet unlike it. And when presented in this way the dancer's art communicates to the audience a new beauty perceived, created and lived.

As is known to those who have some acquaintance with the biography of Rabindranath Tagore, he had early found in himself a love for rhythm, rhythm in song, rhythm in words, rhythm in thought. Late in life when he was correcting manuscripts he began to trace the emendations freely into such forms as they would take and thus discovered that he had a feeling for linear rhythm in his hand. The earliest corrections took the form of horizontal scratches which left thin threads of white between the black lines. This black and white design he enclosed in a drawing like that of a cartouche. As the erasures often extended over several lines, the artist took in the words in a preceding sentence or the next, and the next but one sentence, by a scrawl with the back end of his pen, till the erasure formed the figure of a snake which had eaten several frogs, or a bird in flight. Of course, as anyone will find who tackles a galley proof in this way that the erasures can flow in many directions and take on different shapes if the inner sense of design is compelling enough. From these rough corrections the aged child artist developed more complex patterns. Sometimes the black ink began to flow like the river Padma in the cold weather, interspersed with many sandy islands and revulets, and at other times it coursed down like the Ganges at Hooghly.

These flowing lines began soon to be modelled into shape almost as an oil painter gives weight to the one side of a model's face; or they began to be formed into arabesques, always growing from the centre, or the point which was their natural axis, but spreading their evolutionary process towards a picture as in the Bengali Alpona creeper designs, which proceed whither the artist's inspiration leads them. Thus the movement, generated at any given point, had no check except the artist's own sense of harmony. But the inherent rhythm was sufficiently organic in Tagore's lines to give even his earliest efforts a distinctive style.

Nor is there anything self-consciously poetical and literary about this primitive art. For the kind of metaphor which Tagore used in his poems is completely eschewed in his paintings. Whereas in the role of a poet he had a vision, a mental picture, before his mind's eye, as a painter the old man trusted his hand and, rejecting all pre-conceived notions of design, merely pushed his pen along whither it would go. That it often went to form a design is proved by the fact that, as in Gertrude Stein's prose, certain words are created by the inspired muscular tension of the hand itself, so certain lines tended to create harmonious pictures in the free drawings of Tagore and to accertuate rhythmic form. That is to say, wherever the pen wandered like 'one who walks in dream on perilous path' it gathered up the various strokes on the page into an ultimate design which seemed under the impress of Tagore's instinct to be the only one possible in the circumstances. Of course, not every line was infallible. In fact, many did not get anywhere and had to be abandoned. Or they formed into patterns which were stiff and hard and unbending. But this was mainly so in the transitional period, when he was experimenting. And even here there was a tenderness in the individual lines, which was destined to achieve a supple grace and help the evolution of his art.

In a charming and humorous apology for his excursion into the realm of painting, Tagore confirms my analysis of the process of his discovery in words which are very important to the understanding of his development: 'I had come to know that rhythm gives reality to that which is desultory, which is insignificant in itself. And, therefore, when the scratches in my manuscript cried, like sinners, for salvation, and assailed my eyes with the

ugliness of their irrelevance, I often took more time in rescuing them into a merciful finality of rhythm than in carrying on what was my obvious task...In the process of this salvage work I came to discover one fact, that in the universe of forms there is a perpetual activity of natural selection in lines and only the fittest survives which has in itself the fitness of cadence and I felt that to solve the unemployment problem of the homeless heterogenous into an inter-related balance of fulfilment, is creation itself.'

The modest tone of this preface to his artistic work must not however, be interpreted to mean that Rabindranath was merely an adept of the doodle. I have seen a large collection of doodles, significant among which were those of H. G. Wells, a highly ingenious and inspired draughtsman. But in a great deal of doodling, ideological interpretation or representation seems only too obvious. The influence of the photograph and of the commercial poster percolates into most metropolitan minds. But there are artists who deliberately seek release from all that they have learnt in order to give expression to the most spontaneous, primitive and innocent reactions of their sub-conscious world. Tagore's development is much more akin to the latter than to the former.

For, after the stage of connecting various erasures into the shapes of bird's beaks, archipelagoes, snakes, his drawing seems to have gone through a musical phase. In some pictures he seems to let his lines listen to an inner music so that there is visible the tension of point and counterpoint in the curves of the figures that are forming and we witness some of the rarest equivalents of sound outside Disney. I wonder how unconsciously conscious he was of this intent, because in several figures some children friends of mine immediately recognise the piano...But as he did not even choose to give titles to those earlier pictures, it is no use seeing into them exterior illustrative meanings which he expressly disavowed. They are lines animated by a vital decorative instinct, lovely, sinuous and soft as things are in dreamland, a heightened rendering of the real world, of it and yet superior to it.

But before long Tagore began to give names to his pictures and it is quite obvious that the artist had begun to gather the various threads of his technique and was creating designs which have constant external resemblances. Of course, the starting point is the

same as in the earliest erasures, and the pictures are arche-typal in character. For instance, Tagore's vultures and crows and pelicans and doves, or his human beings and flowers are in no sense representational, but transformations of his instinctive reactions, symbols of his linear rhythm, expressions of his sense of plastic form. If it were not that the term 'abstract' has come to be a term of abuse, I would like to characterise them as such. Only, as I have pointed out above, I do not mean to imply that Tagore's ideographs have lost all sense of reality. Rather it seems to me that growingly his ideograph becomes more and more concrete, because the painter now includes within the orbit of his tactile and motor experience certain immediate visual stimuli. But always it remains the intense expression of his experience of reality. The selection of the sense data is economical and everything is subject to the rhythms which satisfy his own psychological needs, rooted in physiological rhythms which ultimately dictate the plastic expression of his figures and to which the associational constituents of the picture supply the outer clothing.

That the title or the literary content is, however, merely an added grace and not the plastic essential is clear from the fact that, starting from premises quite integral to his own temperament, Rabindranath Tagore reaches conclusions in his search for form not very different from his European contemporaries. For instance, his lovely and yet sinister head of a girl is like the egg-shaped heads of girls painted by Amedeo Modigliani, and several of his pictures are reminiscent of Rouault, thus proving that the basis of aesthetic appreciation of the art of the various peoples of the world is nowadays derived from a sensitiveness to form which is to a large extent free from photography and geography. It would almost seem as though the inherent logic of form, or plastic expression, is founded in response to rhythm, whether this rhythm be linear, of colour composition or surface relations, and that the collective unconscious of an epoch can embrace places as distant as Bolpur, Bengal and a studio in Paris or New York. But those who know how the most sensitive minds of our age have seen through the bluff of so called 'civilisation' and respond to myth and fantasy like the simple, so called primitive peoples, will know that the coincidence of their techniques are nothing very surprising.

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Four drawings b...

In this context it is interesting to note that about the same time as Tagore began to experiment with his ideographs and matured a style like Modigliani's, another poet, the Spaniard, Frederico Garcia Lorca, drew pictures which independently approached the same ideals as those of Salvador Dali, and the English novelist, D.H. Lawrence, found himself suddenly possessed by a demon which expressed itself in a set of strangely vivid paintings born of the new freedom he sought in a fresh medium. The technical range of all these painters is necessarily limited and they remain curiosities of the art world, but the lesson which the bursting of the hidden springs of their genius teaches us is that the human race is potentially much richer and would give us a great deal more beauty if only the mute are given the opportunities they need. Painting, like poetry and truth, it seems, will out like murder, once the inner depths have been touched.

The image I have used in the last sentence will, of course, be turned against me by those who, in their impatience to judge a painting, apart from the tests of imitation of nature and the outer literary associations, will say of Tagore's paintings, as they say of Picasso's: 'Is it art or is it double talk?' But the 'new' in art is always, contaminated by the 'old'—which was itself the 'new' of yesterday. If, however, the fundamental fact be grasped that the common denomination of all art, whether that of the child prodigies or Van Gogh or Picasso or Tagore or the Neanderthal man, is rhythm, we may begin to train our eyes to look for symbols of the true language of art and not merely lose ourselves in the outer disguises of convention and dead habit.

THE CROOKED MIRROR :
Notes on some Indian Caricatures.

To Rudi Van Leyden

1

Doctor Samuel Johnson, the 18th century English poet and wit, defined caricature as an "exaggerated resemblance in drawing". And, by and large, that definition would seem to sum up the qualities implicit in a caricature fairly adequately, because from times immemorial the primary character of a caricature, as against an ordinary drawing has been to exaggerate and to ridicule by such exaggeration. The etymology of the word caricature, originally *caricatura* from the Italian, seems to have developed its present associations gradually, through the acquisition of several secondary meanings. *Caricatura* started out as quite a respectable word, denoting the loading of a ship, a gun, and by analogy, a sausage. The loading became over-loading and developed into exaggeration; which is how it came to be associated with the Italian Encyclopaedia definition of it as 'a ridiculous portrait in which the defects are exaggerated'. Later the general term caricature came to mean any laughing picture and the bounds of its definition became somewhat fissiparous, embracing the widest variety of pictorial or political satire. But the roots of caricature are deeply connected with exaggeration in a portrait and its true spirit is expressed by the personal peculiarities, the personal defects and the other oddities, between the sublime and the grotesque, that the artist seizes upon to hold up his fellowmen to ridicule or amusement. Of course, the exaggeration implicit in a caricature may be only perceptible as the flavour of personality. Nevertheless caricature is the art of the opposition, of the agin feeling, an attack on a man's appearance, taking the edge off his dignity if only to show how he has fallen from grace or the perfection which is the ideal of most human beings, in so far as they seem always to have been very touchy about their personal appearance. The philosophy of this art is embedded, therefore, in the need for laughter, its morality is based on the distinction between the perfect goodness of the angel, in whose shape man is supposed to have been born, and the viciousness of the devil which he is said to acquire ; its technique consists in the detection of the vague

suggestion of a possible grimace or some favourite distortion towards which nature seems to be particularly inclined, as Henri Bergson puts it. It is the art *par excellance* of humanism, of the world in which the spirit of man is most dominant.

2

Although caricature as a modern art is associated in our country, as indeed elsewhere, with the press, being for the most part today an art of printed reduplication and deriving from the newspaper the power, the danger and the charm which it possesses, as a form of human expression it is as old as art itself, being implicit in Vedic poetry and classical drama as well as in early painting and sculpture and on Greek vases as well as Roman walls. Man has laughed as he has wept in every age.

In the scribblings of the primitive man in the caves of Central India, discovered by Fergusson, we already see certain rhythmic designs which in their insistence on the peculiar features, long legs or pin heads, show a graphic virtuosity in the representation of the friend and the foe alike. The instinct which went to create these, as in the scribblings of the Altamara Caves, in the art of the bushmen or in the drawings of children, is mimetic. It is fundamental to the nature of the primitive to caricature before he can portray. And the peculiar fantasy, which is the reality perceived by the naive consciousness, derived its astrigence from the innocence which comes from something deep down in man's nature, perhaps from the awareness of disproportion in nature, the deformation in the supposedly perfect but really skin-deep harmony of form. This sensitiveness to the discordances of human personality is some times so profound in the so-called primitive man that, though we laugh more terribly because we have derived more knowledge through our heritage, we do not seem to have acquired more pity than that which is displayed by our earliest ancestors.

At Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, the designs on the pottery and the images of glass, clay, wood, gold and stone also show the imaginative quick, the vital feeling for the impending bias of shapes in several forms.

And in the hymns of the later Vedas, our earliest known books, the Dasyus, or the dark skinned, original neolithic inhabitants of

India are caricatured from the standpoint of the white skinned, invading Aryans, who conquered, as well as were conquered by, the people of the soil. The Dasyus, who had already evolved an infinitely varied and rich civilisation of their own before the Aryans came to India, have bequeathed to posterity the profuse efflorescence of a heightened imagination whose symbols often show an insistence on the peculiar powers of the various tree spirits, snake spirits, yakshas, griffins, nereids and fauns among whom their fancies wandered. The influence of the exaggerations implicit in the popular art of those long eras can be felt in the work of generations ever afterwards. The sculptures of a thousand years took their fantastic shapes from the powerful and weird imagery in which the early peoples of India conceived their gods as more powerful and superhuman on the one hand (and thus to be worshipped as givers of blessings) and more evil and sub-human personifications (to be appeased against the spells cast by them on humanity). No wonder that one of the current dictums of the more sophisticated thinkers of this period runs: 'The vulgar look for their God in water, men of knowledge in celestial bodies; the ignorant in wood, brick and stones; but the wisest in the universal self'.

In the epics, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, which record the human history of the occupation of the Indus and the Ganges valleys by the layers of the Aryan peoples, there is a considerable amount of portraiture in which the enemy, the force of evil, is always caricatured. Such figures as Arjuna and the five Pandus contended, within their role as embodiments of good, for instance, with Jarasandha whom Bhima destroys, or the hosts of Yama whom Savitri defies; and even the Kurus are caricatured. The villain of the piece in the *Ramayana* is the ten-headed king Ravana, with the donkey's crown cresting his diabolism.

As poetry is essentially a criticism of life, much of the early verse of India depends on dramatic portraiture to achieve its tensions. And more even than the epics, the dramas and poems of the Classical renaissance are replete with caricatures, because they are instinct with human standards. And pity, as well as laughter, at the follies of man expresses in them the catharsis of literature.

All the evidence we can glean about caricature, as, indeed, for the whole art of painting in the Epic and Classical periods is, however, literary. For no remains have been found of the pictures of these times, except the numerous references to the frescoes in the palaces, like that of King Rama's, described by the dramatist Rhava-Bhuti and of the painted portraits mentioned by Kalidasa in *Sakuntala*.

3

In the wake of the revolutionary doctrine of the Buddha, who pitted himself against the Brahminical oligarchy and destroyed their hold on the folk imagination for the next five hundred years, arose the great cave temples or monasteries in which the monks painted frescoes and wall drawings, informed by that respect and love for human life which the Blessed one had preached.

In the extant paintings of Ajanta and Bagh there are to be found the last remains of an undoubtedly rich art which had flourished as a long tradition. And, from these works it is evident that the first mature artists of India had discovered for themselves the implications of Aristotle's dictum that men must of necessity be represented as either better than they really are, or worse, or failing that just as ordinary mortals. For, on the walls of Ajanta, particularly, can be seen imaginative picturisations of almost the whole of human life. Ostensibly, there are representations of the Jataka, or the Buddhist birth stories, but there is implicit in them an instinct for form as such, a deep understanding of the plastic and humanitarian undertones of paint, a comprehension of the forces of life in terms of phenomena as well as romance.

Apart from the mastery of technique displayed in the tender paintings, enormous cartoons, and pictures of animal and bird life, which form the bulk of the art of Ajanta, there are occasional caricatures such as the two men in the small panel on the ceiling of Cave 1, which show the instinct of the artist for delicate laughter.

Not much remains, apart from this sketch, of the varied caricatures there may have been. But presumably the painters of those days, being the decorative artists of a comparatively subtle and gracious civilisation, informed by the Buddha's doctrine of

ultimate compassion and understanding of the whole of life, in its greatest incarnations as well as in its least forms, brought irony rather than crude laughter to those whom they sought to ridicule. Certainly, the Buddha's teaching had eliminated, from the age which he directly influenced, the mockery of that suffering and ugliness which cannot help itself. And though the drawing referred to in Cave 1 shows no physical deformity in the men caricatured, the satire, based obviously on the clownishness of the figures, is mild and without a trace of bitterness. This feeling is strengthened if we can look at the similar caricatures from Ruwanweli Dagoba in Anuradhapura, 6th-8th century, of the Kinnara and Lotuses and the Dwarf.

In this regard, then, the period of the Classical Renaissance, often called the Golden Age of India, was uniquely sophisticated. For both the Epic Age which preceded it, and the Pauranic and Mediaeval periods which were to follow, though more robust also seem to have been cruder; the former era because of the scorn of the alien conquerors for the men they subjugated and the latter because of the re-establishment of the caste hierarchy in its worst forms, for a thousand years to come.

We have little or no paintings and drawings of the long Pauranic and Mediaeval period, but there is a series of historical temples full of some of the most heroic sculpture in the world.

While this sculpture carries on the great tradition of the artisans of the Kushan, Gupta and Maurya dynasties, with that imaginative mastery over the transformation of the human form in plastic terms which is the hall mark of all the best Indian work, the caricatures of gate-keepers on the doorways, and dwarfs and griffins on the brackets of friezes, indicate scorn for human beings on the lower rungs of the ladder, which though it may cause amusement nevertheless evidences to ages of contempt.

Of course, the rationalisation of their superior position by the Brahmins in the various codes and grammars, led to a corresponding aesthetic. For, according to the commonly accepted philosophical theory, there are three *Gunas* or qualities, which express the three phases of *Prakriti* (Matter) in ordinary life: *Sattvas* (Goodness or Truth); *Rajas* (fierceness or passion); and *Tamas* (Gloom). All experience was characterised by these

qualities, everything partook more of one of these than of the other, and was, therefore, real, fiery or gloomy. So the images according to the *Sukranitisara*, are also, *Sattvika*, *Rajasika* and *Tamasika*. The first two kinds of images are generally those of the Gods and exalted beings; 'a Tamasik image is a terrible armed figure, fighting and destroying the demons.' Still another classification of images is: *Nara* (Man-God); *Krura* (Terrible); *Asura* (Demonic); *Bala* (Infantile); and *Kumara* (Juvenile). And 'even the misshapen image of a God is to be preferred to that of a man, howsoever attractive the latter may be; for, perchance one (man) in a million has perfect form, perfect beauty.'

It is obvious that caricature is covered in this codification under the *Tamasik* and *Krura* groups of images. And, though the virtuosity and individual skill of the artisan often infuses into the figures of these groups a sense of form which is highly imaginative and lovable to us who have, through the passage of time, benefitted from the many barbarities of history, the laughter of the men of religion of the days in which these stones were carved was naturally more bitter than ours.

The influence of the *Tamasik* (Gloomy) style was felt equally sharply in the folk paintings of the Mediaeval periods which have survived. Many of the drawings executed to illustrate the psychology of ritualistic worship consisted of personifications of the terrible moods of the goddess Kali as well as of the various intricate phases of the human psyche revealed in the Buddhist and Hindu Tantrik or magical literatures.

And many of the Western Indian paintings of the Jain Schools also show the tormented outlines of faces at once nervous and sensual, representations of human beings whose passage through life is made difficult by the awareness of fears that belong to an age of conformity which is also on the threshold of the Reformation.

The schools of painting which flourished under the Mughals synthesised the deep awareness of the indigenous craftsmen to the spiritual discords of the human personality, in an age of change, to the clear draughtsmanship of the studios of Herat, Teheran, Samarkand and Bokhara. And the distinctively Indian

portraiture which developed at the courts of the Mughal Emperors, as well as their feudatory princes, brings us into the same kind of world which we see in Europe of the 15th to 18th centuries, a world in which though all excellence is in the inheritance of man, the individual character of each man is fast becoming the determining point of evaluation. In the series of Mughal portraits it is possible to see the vague suggestion of many graces and grimaces. And in the picture of Akbar's courtier, Mulla do Piyazah, whose wisdom so resembled folly that it became wit, we have an inimitably sensitive caricature that is one of the high lights of Indian art.

The decline of the Mughal Empire was marked by disharmonies in which all the permutations and combinations of greed and power cut across the unifying strata of the moribund village societies, sustained by the great *Bhakti* (devotional) movement, which had arisen in the wake of the three cults of Hinduism, *Vishnavism*, *Saivism*, *Saktism*. As there were few stabilising values in a world of discord, we find that even the religious urges of the people were subject to dark entanglements in the hands of many self-appointed saints, saviours and prophets. It was a time of violence very much like our own qualitatively, when hagiology and superstition took the place of thought. And the subjugation of the elements of disharmony being delayed, there came a rift between the central ruling power and its dependencies as well as the villages, which last became more and more the centres of cooperation.

The resurgence of many folk schools of art in the various parts of the country at this time may be presumed to have been the direct result of social disharmony, the urge for integration in the midst of chaos. Of these movements the Kangra, Jaipur and the other Rajputs schools of art are now famous. And one of the great documents of the caricaturist's art of India comes from this period in the cartoon of *Indian Saints* in the Lahore Museum, first published by Ananda Coomaraswamy in his *Indian Drawings*. A rare remnant among many *Tamasik* pictures, this unique drawing could not have been achieved without much more cartooning by unknown artists of the most vital imaginations. Its superb characterisation, its bitter acidity and its deep recalcitrance make it a caricature of eternal and universal significance.



Mulla do Pazar (16th century)

the attack of reason on the vicious circles of mystic faith is appreciated.

The deeper tradition of folk culture in East and South India attained an ever richer profusion of creative art, and love, in the sense of *bhakti*, as well as the mundane human urges, found expression in the *Pat* drawings of Bengal.

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At the end of the 18th century the British had already introduced the printing press. And through the wars which raged at the dissolution of the Mughal Empire, and in the wake of John Company's expansion of its trading centres, there arose immoralities and violences, which have been vividly described by the more romantic English both in prose and through pictorial art. In fact there is no better testimony to that age which shook 'the pagoda tree', than the cartoons by Thomas Rowlandson showing the 'Nabobs' with their mushroom fortunes, and the 'other birds of passage and prey'.

The impact of the European three dimensional art on the Indian emphasis on the symbolic in painting and sculpture was, however, deplorable in its results; for the time for synthesis was not yet. But the clash of values resulted in a steady and gradual development of a new political and social tradition. The age old tolerance of Indian thought merged with the English liberal conception of law; the revolt against the extension of politics by plunder and annexation, brought Pantanjali's dictum that 'one must always grouse against authority' into line with the revolt against authority which the democratic tradition in Europe had encouraged; the urge of hunger on the landscape supplied the cue for passion for nationhood and the ideals of French Revolution.

The inspiration behind the modern movement of art in India came from these fecundating forces. So that before the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, it was journalism and the newly developing consciousness which was supplying the basis for an artistic renaissance. The hallmark of the periods which now began was a kind of intellectual detachment not unconnected with national bias, but expressing itself

through the struggle of ideas and values more than through the instruments of war. And the age shows a broadening of vision which is reflected in the writings of all the great publicists from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru.

Some of the cartoons which appeared in the *Hindi Punch* of Bombay, or in the pages of the *Oudh Akhabar* and numerous other papers, reveal this kind of objectivity about the ultimate rulers as well as about those who were poised in the struggle against the alien power. The hundreds of caricatures in the *Hindi Punch* are typical of the liberal satire which showed the crooked mirror to every one so that they may have time to pause and think before going on any further.

And though the suppressions of later years brought greater ridicule of the idols of authority, the passions were always held in check by the bourgeois intellectuals who also happened to be the leaders of the Indian political and social renaissance.

The imaginative sympathy, which came with the noble causes espoused by the intelligentsia, brought a certain respect for the individual and the transformation of life through art as it had begun to be understood in Europe. And the chief painters of the Bengali renaissance, Abanindranath Tagore and Gogendranath Tagore, both made caricature a medium for some of their most studied work.

The two Tagore brothers were synthesising in their cartoons, as in their paintings, traditions as various as those of Ajanta, the Chinese, the Japanese and the Western European. But they were pioneers of front rank ability and have left some of the most exciting caricatures in contemporary India.

While Abanindranath Tagore strained after a stylised expression, Gogendranath insisted on simplicity of line, which he wanted to make quick and firm and self-explanatory without much text. And while the elder brother remained an experimentalist in this regard, the younger, Gogendranath ranged, in his two portfolios of caricature, from deep irony to kindliness and sardonic humour. With a wit slightly reminiscent of Max Beerbohm, Gogendranath is certainly the originator of the contemporary tradition of caricature in India.

The general human tragedy of the twentieth century, with its two bloody wars and its constant crises and tensions, brought India, in some ways very pointedly within the orbit of the major world clashes. So that the younger generations of Indian intellectuals are at home in the welter of controversy that rages, all the world over, on the question of political democracy and economic democracy and its various incidences on human life. Naturally, a cartoonist like Shankar is not, therefore, alien to the spirit and the technique of caricature as it has developed in the rich history of this art in Europe. Similarly, the hundreds of other caricaturists, working in and around the newspapers and journals of this country, evidence to the exaltation and terror of seeing quite clearly the conflicting phenomena of the Empires on the one hand and the peoples of the earth on the other.

The techniques of the young cartoonists vary from the very imitative to the indifferent as well as the occasionally inspired contemporary Indian art; the whole question of form perplexes the men born of one world struggling to be ushered into another. At any rate, however, there is a general realisation that a pencil is very convenient when it is not necessary to use the sword.

REFLECTIONS ON INDIAN SCULPTURE.

To K. de B. Codrington

There are not many people today, at least among the connoisseurs, who will deny that; both in quantity and quality the extant monuments of Indian sculpture display as wide a range of human achievement as the works produced during the whole of the European renaissance and after. Then why is it that even the chief masterpieces of this branch of Indian art are comparatively unknown to the world, not to speak of the thousands of interesting and vital monuments which are listed in the memoirs of the archaeological survey ?

It is true, as Dr. Hermann Goetz says, that art history is a very young science, but I feel that there is a little more to it than merely that. For, everyone knows, that there is no dearth of literature on the monuments of European art: I have counted at least a hundred odd works in the British Museum catalogue of printed books dealing with the slabs of stone poised on each other at Stonehenge. And how many millions of words have been written about the Parthenon, the works of the Romans, about mediaeval and baroque sculpture, and about the modern schools?

The fact is that while in Europe and America art history progressed from mere surveys of collections of 'classic' and 'national' forms to subtler and more sophisticated standards of judgment, till art was exalted as the total expression of life, in the East, and particularly in India, the appreciation of art has so far remained, for many reasons, bureaucratic, religious or sentimentally nationalist and at the best merely literary.

Now, it is obvious, that we cannot live in the present muddle, but must create some values, critical tests or considerations through which it may be possible to sift the really important art works from the bad ones, so that the knowledge of our tremendous and overwhelming heritage can be spread among our own people, and the peoples of the fast contracting world.

I want, here, to throw out one or two suggestions about the obligations we owe to our better judgment for shedding our familiar prejudices in judging Indian sculpture.

First of all, let us put aside the biased views of the English commentators. Mr. Aldous Huxley, one of the most enlightened of these critics, frankly admitted in his travel book *Jesting Pilate*, that he was biased against the kind of mind and temperament which produced Hindu art. 'A visit to India makes one realise,' he said, 'how fortunate so far at any rate as the arts are concerned, our Europe has been in its religions. The Olympian religion of antiquity and, except occasionally, the Christianity which took its place, were both favourable to the production of works of art, and the art which they favoured was, on the whole, a singularly reasonable and decent kind of art...Neither paganism nor Christianity imposed restrictions on what the artist might represent; nor did either demand of him that he should try to represent the unrepresentable...How different is the state of things in India. Here, one of the two predominant religions forbids absolutely the representation of human form, and even, where Muslim orthodoxy is strict, of any living form whatever...Hinduism, on the other hand, permits the representation of things human but adds that the human is not enough. It tells the artist that it is his business to express symbolically the superhuman, the spiritual, the pure metaphysical idea...The Hindus are too much interested in metaphysics and ultimate Reality to make good artists. Art is not the discovery of Reality—whatever Reality may be, and no human being can possibly know. It is the organisation of chaotic appearance into an orderly and human universe.'

Since he wrote this, Mr. Huxley seems to have changed his mind and taken to the Vedanta, though we don't know if he has also yet changed his view of Indian art. But anyone who has looked at any part of the vast assemblage of Indian art is bound to regard Mr. Huxley's earlier judgment as pure bunk. For, never, in spite of the taboo against imitating the functions of God by creating forms, did the Muslim sensibility dry up; and never, in spite of the search for metaphysical realities, did the Hindu imagination lose its touch with the realities of the phenomenal world. And I suggest that the bias against 'the many-limbed monsters...symbolic of the cosmos', is just the unconscious reaction of people deeply imbued with Christian puritanism or the irritation of those used to art produced in the comparatively mild climate of Western Europe, at the exuberant works of men inhabiting the intemperate, hot landscapes of the tropics. Maybe,

it is also the opinion of people used to Olympian deities, the gods who are men made Gods, and in realising whom the artist seldom went beyond the human form, thus making art more or less representational and versimilitudinous. But whatever the reasons for this attitude, it will be generally admitted that it is highly superficial and commonplace and does not ever represent the younger generation of European artists who are growingly thinking in terms of art as interpretation rather than representation.

It is not necessary, however, in order to restore balance, depth and objectivity into criticism merely to *react* to these reactions as our elders did by explaining how wonderful was the metaphysics of the Hindus and how men could be detached and yet attached at the same time. Any positive effort at creating values demands that we go back and look at the works about which such violent controversy has raged and see them with new eyes, make a fresh approach.

Anywhere in India would do. You have only to travel a hundred miles or so, or even less to come across some of the monuments of ancient or mediaeval Indian sculpture. Go and look at these originals and make your own judgment, for, when in doubt, always go to the sources. And you will find that the great bulk of Indian art emphatically shows just the kind of organisation of chaotic appearances into an orderly universe that Mr. Huxley considers to be the essence of art. Of course, it may be more or less than this, it may express high metaphysical aims or merely a partial hedonism, but, since we live in the 20th century and often do not share the metaphysical ideals of the ancients and are not armed with the exact quotations from the scriptures or the *Silpa Shastras*, we are forced to look at these works with naked eyes—always presuming that these eyes are capable of looking inwards as well as outwards. I am certain, however, that this fresh approach will yield results, excite strange sensations and enrich us with a knowledge of other worlds than those with which we complacently surround ourselves.

I happened to go to Mathura recently and visited the modern museum which has been built by the heroic efforts of the late Pandit Radha Krishan, about a mile away from where the main town spreads itself on the banks of the Jamuna, hallowed with

tender memories of the sports of the legendary cowherd god, Krishna, and drawing to itself millions of pilgrims from every part of India. And it was during this visit to the Mathura Museum that I fully realised the significance of certain basic truths about Indian sculpture which I feel have been ignored by the foreigners and twisted and perverted by our own scholars on the defensive.

From the extensive collection, beautifully housed in the new red brick building matching the red sandstone in which are most of the carvings, it would seem that several great schools of sculpture flourished in or around Mathura during the early centuries of Indian history. For there are a variety of statues, architectural pieces, bas reliefs and terra-cottas here of the Buddhist, Jain, Mauryan, Sunga, Kushan, Saka and later periods. And, apart from the rubbish preserved in the garden within the quadrangle of the Museum, they all represent some of the finest achievements of human skill to be found anywhere in the world.

I stood and sat for about several hours in the galleries of this extraordinary shrine of North Indian culture and many contradictory impulses and ideas welled up inside me, intimations of strange currents in the dark whorl of the subconscious as well as certain interrupted and broken visions of worlds of faculty and experience which are difficult to communicate except in the kind of exclamations which one makes when one is in the presence of such grandeur: 'Beautiful! Extraordinary! Strange! Marvelous!'

These exclamations are pardonable because, fundamentally, our response to all plastic expression is psychological, based on responses to rhythms, whether these rhythms be linear, compositional or rhythms of suggested space or colour. Deep in one's nature are the buried memories of the prelogical and mythological ages mingled with the emergent characteristics of new feelings and thoughts, intimations of the creative liberation that we achieve through contemplating any piece of plastic organisation. Every such concentrated effort at understanding builds a bridge between the personal and the collective unconscious of our growing human society. And we are stirred by emotions which in the event of a broken tradition become reactions to form as such with only the barest guides from historical testimony.

I remember reacting, for instance, to the massive standing figure of Parkham Yaksha, a statue which seems like a carving direct out of rock, stepping out, as it were, from the imagination of primitive folk, the weight of his torso and the huge pads of his buttocks reminding us of the heavy gait of that essentially peasant civilisation. That figure stands out as a colossus, dominating all else by the sheer power of nature that oozes from it. The workmanship is free and reminiscent of the heroic style of the early Mayan Sculpture, an anticipation of the grand life that was emerging as our nomadic ancestors settled down to a village society.

Already, in one leap, we seem to jump from the basic rhythm of early sculpture to the graces of Buddhist art which flourished in Mathura in the Sunga period, as an offshoot of the great school of Sanchi and Bharhut. Only a few railing pillars and cross bars of this phase remain, however, indicating the prolificity of the period and the beauty of the work done in it, leaving us no choice but to fall back on the direct response to certain forms unaided by archaeological knowledge.

Similarly, one goes through the guide book chronology of the Kushan period, the 'golden age' of the Mathura School of sculpture, remembering the full-size portrait statue of Kanishka, the Bodhisattva images, Nagas, Nagis, Yakshas, Yakshis, Kuberas and torana architraves, only to be forced to a visual selection of certain pieces which suit our sense of rhythm, patterns of plastic expression which compel admiration for their own sake. Forgotten are the magical cults which these works are supposed to signify, buried the feelings of awe or reverence which they excited in those old ages, and there only remains the domestic feeling as a common denominator between our ancestors who worshipped them and ourselves who would wish to consecrate every moment of life with intense realisations. It is possible that even then the life of the householder seemed as inspiring as the religious ideals which dictated the outer forms of temples and their statues. Certainly, the happy, joyous groups of dancers, and courtesans and mothers and children who jostle together in the compositions on the reliefs and panels give evidence of a society which was as hedonistic as its shrine sculpture indicates its purely devotional character.

Let me illustrate this by referring to two sculptures which Mr. V. S. Agrawal has written up from the finds on a site in the ancient village of Mahole, about two and a half miles from Mathura. They are variously, a full size figure of the Bodhisattva and a new Bacchanalian group.

The Bodhisattva image is 8'—3" in height and is carved in the round from the spotted red sandstone of Mathura. Its right arm is broken and lost, while the left hand holds the drapery at the waist. The delicately carved drapery, which gives the effect of transparency, leaves the right shoulder bare and reaches down to the folds of a garment which is held at the waist by a knotted girdle. There is a cluster of lotus buds between the feet of the Bodhisattva, over a coiled lotus garland. By the left leg is an Asoka tree carved on a panel. The head of the Buddha is shaven with a shallow depression in the skull. There is a faint dot between the eyebrows, and the earlobes are elongated. At the back of the head there are traces of a halo.

Stylistically, it is in the same accent as the well-known standing Bodhisattva from Sarnath. The approximate date assigned to this by the learned writer is 170 A.D., which coincided with the reign of the Kushan Emperor Vasudeva. And Mr. Agrawal thinks that this Mahole statue is related to the three other Bodhisattvas in the Mathura Museum as well as to the tall figure from Lakhnan near Aligarh. Apart from that, of course, it seems to be in direct descent from the colossal Yaksha statue from Parkham which I have mentioned before.

If the last hypothesis be at all plausible (and one's eyes seem to suggest that it is) then there was obviously a continuous school of Mathura sculptors. And as this school persisted for some hundreds of years, it is quite clear that their preoccupation with the sense of form was at least as important as was their addiction to a profound sense of religion. It seems to me that their sense of form, their love of carving as such, is more obvious than their religiosity.

For, look at the gay abandon of the sensuous Bacchanalian group which was also found on the same site. This sculpture carved on both sides measures 3'—4" x 2'—6" x 1'—2". Apparently, it supported a bowl which, now broken, rested on a carved tree

in the background. On the obverse side there are four figures with a lovely woman in the middle, half kneeling in a drunken stupor, her left hand resting on a little girl, who holds a wine cup, and her right hand held by a standing male figure seemingly her husband, who is supporting her. The fourth figure is a female attendant, perhaps a hermaphrodite, as Mr. Agrawal suggests, from her undeveloped breasts, masculine shoulders and hips.

This Bacchanalian group is related to some other specimens of its type discovered near Mathura, some of which are in the mixed Greco-Indian style. But the Mahole sculpture before us, like the Palikhera and the Naroli Bacchanalian groups, are authentically Indian in dress and features and are delightful examples of a purely mundane art which shows the sheer virtuosity of the sculptors of the Mathura school, pointing to their love of rhythm as the necessary psychological complement of a physiological need to express themselves.

True to the precepts laid down by the pioneer idealistic critics of Indian art, Mr. Agrawal interprets the co-existence of these two finds in the same spot with a characteristic generalisation which fits them into the code of Buddhist ethics. 'The Bacchanalian group stands for the sensuous and material side of life, symbolising the pleasures that overflow the bowl of life, which these groups invariably depict. The Buddha on the other hand represents the ascetic ideals of internal peace attained by self-mastery and his defeat of Mara, the genius of worldly temptations. After the Buddha's victory and final enlightenment Mara pays homage at the feet of the great teacher, which according to the beautiful synthetic ideal of the Mahayana Buddhism, represented a lasting compromise between the life of the world and the life of restraint preached by the Buddha, both of which were consequently enshrined under a common roof inside the same religious edifice. It was this ideal which inspired the works of the Kushan artists...'

All one can say about such an interpretation is that it may or may not be true. But why should Mr. Agrawal be so disingenuous? Why doesn't he look at the two sculptures as they are and seek to trace the Kushan artist's real, that is to say, his plastic attitude towards his work? The answer obviously will be that the



Yakshini, a drawing of a Mathura sculpture by George Keyt

whole of Indian art is heiratic, that certain canons have been prescribed and that the entire workmanship is in the anonymous tradition, leaving little room for individuality which is a conception associated with the modern Western industrial civilisation.

And, in view of such answers, it is time that we made up our minds to consider the canons once and for all and decided to what extent and how exactly the sculptor obeyed them.

There is no doubt, of course, that the sculptor obeyed the canons. Almost every artist or craftsman obeys the overt or the implied injunctions of his patrons and his time. But no canon can alter his individual genius or skill, the personal style which is the result of his kinetic inheritance, the psychological type of the artist as well as of his capacity to adapt himself to his environment, to master his destiny, as it were. And not all the arguments of iconographers, archaeologists and scholars will convince those who have studied the new mental sciences that 'in Indian art nothing depends upon genius or requires the knowledge of an individual psychology for its interpretations.' It is true that all Indian art has been produced by professional craftsmen who handed down the tradition from father to son or in pupillary succession, but the greatest products of this art are great precisely because some of these artisans were skilful, more original and more sensitive to their material than the others; and that originality and novelty in their creative work was definitely intended if not always realised. Else how is one Chola bronze more beautifully cast than another? Whence the beauty and the poise of one period as against the decadence of the other? And why the attempt at attaining aesthetic virtue, through the use of words like *Rasa* in the ancient critics vocabulary, if God-realisation was the only aim?

The paradox that the vast majority of the works of Indian sculptors display an intensely sensuous awareness of life and yet are supposed to transcend life, can be resolved if we agree that while the approach of the artist was inevitably humanist, since he was a sensitive and highly evolved man, the purpose for which his works were intended were the exaltation of a transcendental religion. The Brahminical dictum that 'only images made for worship are beautiful' is a characteristically doctrinaire

impertinence of the priestly order, which led to the breakdown of the great Indian tradition. But even in the process of its decay, Indian art shows the heroic attempts made by men of sensibility to infuse certain pieces with the vitality of their individual creative power, just as the sculptors of Charters took their revenge on the priests by scribbling on the wall their caricatures of these worthies and their lyrical impulses in beautiful sensuous lines defying all the puritanism of the Christian Church. Specially in Indian sculpture do we come across a negation of all puritanism. For, those vigorous groupings of dancers caught in the abandon of movement in the reliefs at Sanchi, with their swaying drummers and ecstatic musicians, as well as the rapt audiences, suggest a completely uninhibited, gay and sensuous world subsisting on its own rhythms under the formal authority of priests and monks. And the folk imagination is the very antithesis of orthodoxy, in the proliferation of myriads of forms, symbols based on the actual, concrete life of lovers in the lentil fields, mothers desiring children and fathers who pour forth their affection on their children with toys and dolls. Who can forget the intricate carvings of the jewellery with which almost every sculptured figure is decorated and the flowers which embellish every design. And how lovely and passionate are the conjugal embraces of the men and women at Khajuraho and Konarak, naked and unashamed and bearing testimony to a fuller, a richer civilisation than our dry as dust and ossified age? There is a humanity jutting out of the old carvings which compels in us a change of heart if we are not altogether dead to the graces of beauty and tenderness.

'Sculpture', says Prof. Herbert Read, 'is the creation of solid forms which give aesthetic pleasure'. And if by aesthetic pleasure we mean the vitality, perfection and beauty which we feel in the presence of a particular piece, then his simple definition seems to me very adequately to indicate the intent of all carving or modelling.

Of course, this intent is not always self-conscious, for few artists sit down to create their works on the basis of an abstract theory. Nor do they often say to themselves: 'Now we are going to create beauty.' The vivacity or vitality arises perhaps by the concatenation of all those incipient powers and energies in the artist which cannot easily be isolated or analysed under the two

heads, personal vision and social experience. Undoubtedly, the artist applies his intellect to the selection and elaboration of forms in the daily routine of his work, but the elements which go to make his work are as varied as his individual genius and the qualities of the material in which he works, and the cumulative result of his imaginative fervours seizing on the essential qualities of things may be more or less beautiful according to the accidents which depend upon chance.

Let me quote, in this context, some words of the contemporary English sculptor, Henry Moore, who seems to have analysed his mind (and by proxy that of many other sculptors), from his essay, 'The Sculptor's Aims':

'All art is an abstraction to some degree: (in sculpture the material alone forces one away from pure representation and towards abstraction).

'Abstract qualities of design are essential to the value of a work, but to me of equal importance is the psychological, human element. If both abstract and human elements are welded together in a work, it must have a fuller, deeper meaning.

'For me a work must first have a vitality of its own. I do not mean a reflection of the vitality of life, of movement, physical action, frisking, dancing figures and so on, but that a work can have in it a pent up energy, an intense life of its own, independent of the object it represents. When a work has this powerful vitality we do not connect the word Beauty with it.

'Because a work does not aim at reproducing natural appearances, it is not, therefore, an escape from life—but may be a penetration into reality, not a sedative or drugs, not just the exercise of good taste, the provision of pleasant shapes and colours in a pleasing combination, not a decoration to life, but an expression of the significance of life, a stimulation to greater efforts in living.'

I would like to imagine that these aphorisms express the mind of the ancient Indian sculptors as well as they explain the attitude of a modern *avant garde* whether European or Asiatic. For there is a striking similarity in the intention of all these. And human nature, though it changes, tends not to reject principles based on

the quick of life, on immediate experience. And racial psychology, vitality and taste, though varying from age to age and country to country, cannot alter the response of an artist to the material he is working on.

One thing is, however, quite certain that among the long range of the works of Indian sculptors are to be found some of the greatest works ever produced by mankind, and that it is more rewarding to look at them direct than to garb them always in religious and iconographical formulae which at one time surrounded them. The vast researches of scholars and archaeologists may help us by giving a comprehensive picture of the social currents of the time in which they were produced, as gossip adds spice to life, but the essence of works of art can only be realised by looking at them and looking at them again, till we are able to sense the independent, dynamic life they enjoy in their own right, irrespective of the codes though intimately related to the genius who gave them their inner momentum, their organic life. And it is by looking at the great carvings as such that our few contemporary young sculptors will derive the inspiration with which to create, in the new conditions of our new age, works which may be the harbingers of a fresh tradition after the long break of centuries.

A NOTE ON ARCHITECTURE OLD AND NEW

To J. P. J. Billimoria and M. J. P. Mistry

Architecture has its *political use*; it establishes a Nation, draws people and commerce; makes the people love their native country, which passion is the great original of all great actions in a Commonwealth.

Christopher Wren.

If ever we are to have a time of architecture again, it must be founded on a love for the city, a worship of home and nation. No planting down of a few costly buildings, ruling some straight streets, provision of fountains, or setting up a number of stone and bronzed dolls, is enough without the enthusiasm for corporate life and common ceremonial. Every noble city has been a crystallisation of the contentment, pride and order of the community. A period of architecture is the time of a flowing tide.

W. R. Lethaby.

After two hundred years of chaotic building there is visible some interest in architecture in our country. Admittedly, it is only the ancient architecture of India, and particularly Hindu architecture, which is being studied. Even so, it is good to see some attention being paid to an aspect of our renaissance which has hitherto not been written up as painting and dancing have been. As revealed in the researches of a host of scholars, ranging from Fergusson and Havell to Chandra and Acharya, we have such a magnificent past in architecture, with truth in building, regard for materials, function and beauty, always paramount, that it is natural for us, of course, when we think of building at all, to seek inspiration in our past. Certainly, the past has sometimes been very useful in helping to form a new tradition, as, for instance, when the lessons of the 'wooden period' were incorporated into the work of the 'stone period' in India and when the elements of Chaitya architecture merged into the Sikhara and the Sikhara into the Nagara style. But the question arises, with such a heritage as we have acquired from the past what are we to do in the present?

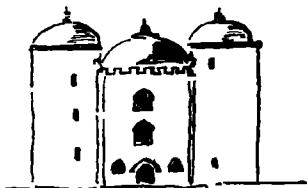
It must be categorically asserted that it is no longer possible now to evolve a new style by reviving or adapting the glorious tradition of our past Indian architecture. For though the fifth

century could imitate the first, and the fifteenth could emulate the example of the ninth, it was only so because the general basis of life was more or less similar in those centuries. The ritualistic needs of Hindu society remained constant, in spite of local variations, right till the end of the 18th century. And though the Mughals brought new cultural impulses which altered the face of northern India, the continuance of a closely knit 'feudal' village economy kept the main traditions intact. There has, however, been a complete break with the economic basis of old India since the coming of British rule. No longer do we live in little, self-sufficient villages and small towns, entirely dependent on agriculture and handicrafts. The land belongs to the landlords, and the handicrafts have been shattered by the influx of western machine made goods. Industry flourishes in the chief cities of our country and the old communal life has been wrecked. We are subject to a cash economy with the attendant consequences of a new division of labour, fundamentally contrary to the spirit of our old unities.

Nor are we the only victims of this disruption. All over the world, the basis of the old societies has been corroded by the forces of the industrial revolution, so that nowhere does present day life bear much resemblance to what it was even a hundred years ago. It is true that the family unit remains intact. But those who know the influence of the cash-nexus on a European family and the gradual reduction of the unit from the group which lived in a fourteen-roomed house to a couple which lives in a four-roomed suburban villa or flat, realise that even the smallest family unit has been broken up.

The increasing ingenuity of science, and ever new inventions, have revolutionised human life. The improvement in communications has accelerated the pace of industrial development and reduced the distance between the main cities of the world to a few hours. Water and air power have been harnessed to the service of man. And new materials have become available, such as steel and concrete and plastic. And they have rendered possible new techniques in building.

Are we, then, to create a new unity in our society and a new kind of architecture with new materials to suit the changed



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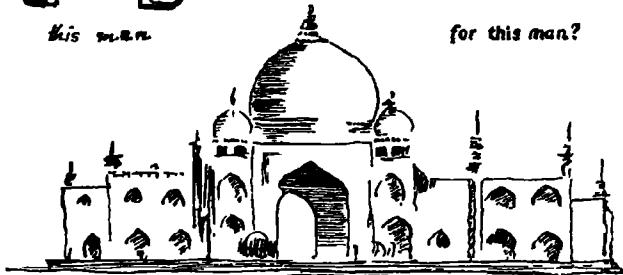
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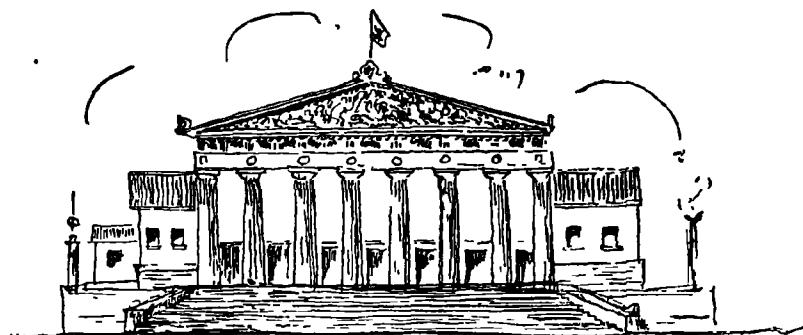
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RAILWAY STATION OR MOGUL PALACE?



INDIA TOWN-HALL OR GREEK TEMPLE?

What is character in a building?

conditions? Or are we to revive the old life and build Magadha or Mahavalipuram all over again?

The question has not been seriously asked in our country, for not many of our political and intellectual leaders have had the leisure to address themselves to such problems while they have been involved in law-breaking and law-making and because our natural pride in nationhood biased us in favour of a certain chauvinism in art and architecture.

That is why Sris Chandar Chatterjee's vulgar revivalist plea can be accepted by public men of the highest repute and why atrocities like the Birla temple at Delhi can be put up without a protest from any critic of standing.

It is true that the evils of the machine have frightened most of us. But it seems as insane for us to recoil back in horror from every machine tool as it is for the greedy lunatics of America to go experimenting with atom bombs to threaten the world into obedience. The more balanced attitude has been expressed by an architect like Maxwell Fry who accepts science and industrialism but 'takes leave to look every new gift horse in the mouth, hoping to know the difference between teeth and fangs.' The destruction wrought by the machine in the last ten years can hardly inspire enthusiasm. But it is possible for those who believe in a future for our country to have faith in our ability to use it more wisely than Europe has done. For we are still said to have some regard for moral and mental sanctions which alone can control the material forces at our disposal and transform them for our benefit.

If our hearts and minds and spirits are really as good as we always proclaim them to be, then we have to face the implications of the completely new situation that has arisen, specially in the field of architecture: We have to use new powers and new materials so that we can enrich the life of man and the community in which he lives. Since the age in which we live is this very disturbed, but potentially rich, 20th century, the age in which man has been forced to break completely away from the modes of living of the past, we have to evolve an absolutely new style of architecture suited to our new needs and new habits. For instance, it is no use our building a town today, without studying the dis-

tance from road and rail and airport, without considering the sources of electricity and motor power. And we cannot build houses in isolation from each other, as self-contained monads, but only as parts of well-planned towns, in themselves parts of bigger units where the good life may be lived by men as individuals in and through the community. And there can be no real, commercial art, whether of painting or sculpture or carpentry, unless we think of these as ancillaries of architecture and town-planning, as integral parts of the business of living together. One of the main considerations which prevents people from envisaging a new style of architecture born of new needs and interests, is that it may be so functional it will not be artistic. But, as my friend Eric Gill used to say, the beauty of a work is in its capacity to fulfil a function well: 'Beauty is the radiance of things made as they ought to be made'. The architect has in all societies had to do a concrete job, to build for a specific purpose, whether religious or domestic. Today there is no great religion to command his allegiance but there is the service of man. In the special circumstances of our age, when half the world lies broken and the other half a virgin landscape never built upon, where millions of people sleep upon pavements, how immense are the opportunities for architects to bring order into chaos, to plan cities and build model villages, and what scope there is for visions inspired by human rhythms and the love of a glorious, rich and intricate life, to give a new meaning to architecture, the mother of all arts!

SURVIVALS OF THE FOLK TRADITION IN THE INDIAN THEATRE

To Herbert Marshall

A safety curtain, with birds and flowers and buxom Victorian wenches around a fountain painted in crude commercial colours, bars you from the mystery as you sit in the auditorium. The play begins round about half-past ten or eleven, just when you have dozed off after the futile game of catching the eye of the lady who sits in the box. For who else but a whore would think of coming to the theatre at midnight, unattended. Certainly she is much more amenable to the whistles, the shrill shouts and the catcalls of the bigger and better heart squanderers than to the surreptitious glances of the respectable little man furtively practising the open and shut eye to attract her. So you have nothing to do but to chew betel leaf or sleep. Suddenly, there is a rustling and you see through your half-open eyes that the safety curtain is going up and also that the red plush blinds are parting, followed by the shooting of a gun which somehow miraculously tears a further curtain into two. And there is the comic pierrot trying to stand on his head. A thudding fall on his spotted behind and you awaken rubbing your eyes. Your patience with the over statements of the clown is rewarded when at last the hero appears, singing. He may be representing Sur Das or Hamlet, but he enters singing dolefully to the accompaniment of much thumping of his heart and rolling of his eyes as though he were convulsed with the ache of a million broken romances. Gesticulating violently with his arms extended, he ultimately reaches a phoney balcony and has a vision of the heroine, who opens out her arms to receive but not to give; for, instead of coming forward to embrace the hero, she bursts into a dithyrambic song of her own. And thus the play proceeds, slowly, surely, not leaving anything to chance and taking you through the paces, as curtain after curtain tears to the shooting of a gun, by way of comedy, tragedy, farce, operetta, heroic drama, morality play and all just in order to ensure that your education is complete by the time you go home at five o'clock in the morning.

This is a slightly exaggerated account of a performance in one of our rare city theatres, but not so exaggerated if one has the

classical repertory of the surviving professional companies in mind. Nothing is too fantastic on this stage. I have been seriously told by a distinguished man of the theatre that during one play a cow was supposed to perform a miracle. She was supposed to enter from one wing of the stage, chew up the rope with which the heroine's hands had been tied by the villain of the piece and then walk out through the opposite wing. Usually the cow performed this trick docilely and efficiently enough, for she had obviously been trained by a circus master. But, occasionally, she took it into her head to walk straight through from one wing to the other without performing the miracle. And, on those occasions, the manager of the theatre appeared, made a little speech about the perversities of cows and the rarity of miracles and asked the audience to be indulgent till the cow could be persuaded to come back and do the necessary and that, meanwhile, the heroine would regale the house with a song. Upon this the heroine burst out into a melody like a bulbul, after which the cow, having been lured back with a bundle of straw, came and duly performed the miracle and walked away and the play proceeded according to schedule.

In our villages the performance of a play usually called *Ras* or *Nautanki* or *Tamasha*, though more vigorous and unpretentious, is often a jumble rather like the European revue, consisting of scenes from a religious or an historical play, interspersed with humorous sketches which are based mainly on satirical narratives about the evil landlord, the moneylender or the Sarkar, and replete with songs, songs and more songs. The relieving grace of the village play is that in it we get a simple survival of the most ancient theatrical principle: the players and the audience are one, forming a unity through the circles in which they sit round the improvised booth of the stage, while the actors walk up to, and from, the dressing room, through the clearing which the audience obligingly affords as and when necessary. Often the audience joins in community singing and the illusion is steadily and surely built up by the actors and the audience acting together, and the spectacle is utterly moving at certain movements. This, however, is not always the case, and the general decay which percolated into our lives through the work of codifiers and grammarians of emotions and moods a thousand years ago has tarnished the humanity of even the village players, the puritanism

of a moribund social order having inhibited the freedom of the mummer, till the taboo against women acting on the village stage is almost complete. In most parts of the country the professional mummers in the village, like the potters or the weavers, form a caste of their own, such as bhānds, nakals and mirāsies. They are itinerant players who visit the houses of the peasants on marriage, birth and betrothal, regaling the audience with jokes and songs and recitals for which they are paid in kind, but kept at an orthodox distance, being regarded more or less as untouchables.

There are, of course, many self-conscious attempts at the evolution of a new theatrical tradition. For over a hundred years, mostly under the impulse of the Western European drama, foreign and indigenous plays have been written and produced. In Bengal, particularly, the genius of the Tagore household gave a definite shape to this art and after the rich creative activity of the last two generations, there has emerged a professional stage of a fairly high order. But in most other parts of the country theatrical activity is restricted to the annual show of the college dramatic society, usually playing in English to an audience whose own kinetic inheritance is something quite different, and the ramshackle circus-theatre of the Parsi entrepreneurs and their imitators.

To such depths of degradation has the great theatrical tradition, built up by ancient and classical India, sunk! And there seems little hope of redeeming it until we take stock of the whole situation in full view of the changes ushered in by the industrial revolution, and self-consciously select from the remnants of the old tradition the basis on which a synthesis, with modern innovations in theatrical art, can be attempted.

2

There can be no denying that there is a great positive factor in our favour: our people are still possessed by an inordinate love of drama and often display natural histrionic talent of a high order. The presence of this instinct is important. For, in the attempt to mould an art form, the emotional inheritance of the people is important, specially in an art form which draws so largely on the senses.

For drama is organically related to impulse, the quick of life, the throbbing, rhythmic flow of instinct and emotion which

gives rise to all movement. The most obvious example of this is in the love dance of the cock before the hen during the mating season, and the war dance of the cocks at all seasons. Spreading its bright plumage, panting and blowing, but proud, the cock enacts the eternal pageant of the spring, and the beauty of its gait, as it prances up in the arranged cock fight, is too familiar in our sports to have escaped attention. Some mother birds are well-known for the way they will walk up and down rhythmically before their nest if a man happens to be about, in order to guard their little ones.

Perhaps the earliest histrionic efforts of primitive man arose when he disguised himself as a bird or animal in stalking his chase. Anyhow, the instinct for drama was present long before he became self-conscious, for he seems to have had excess of energy enough to impersonate and represent, coupled with the uncanny assurance that he could move an audience by means of this representation. The power to act was, therefore, incipient in his nature: the sheer exuberance of his body seems to have prompted him to expand; desire and fear seem to have urged him further, and his growing awareness of the universe obviously enabled him to use this power to extend life and to avert the forces of death.

We do not know exactly at what stage of the development of man the transformation of the dramatic instinct into self-conscious drama took place. But it is fairly certain that an important step was achieved when our primitive ancestors began to dance singly or together, to the accompaniment of their joint cries, grunts and growls, for they could not yet speak or sing. Stamping around the fire, they seem to have been weaving magical spells and in doing this, like M. Jourdain in Moliere's play, who talked prose without knowing it, they were initiating the arts of dance, drama and poetry, with the beat of their dancing feet, with their bird-like shrieks and in the magic they were performing.

Specially important in this context is the dance which our primitive ancestors performed before going out to hunt. Some of them dressed up as hunters and the others as the would-be hunted animals and they danced a mimic hunt in which, of course, the hunters invariably won. The would-be hunted animals were presumably not directly affected by this wish fulfilment magical

dance, but certainly the hunters began to believe that they were going to kill the animals and generally did succeed in doing so, for they now had the cue for passion that they might have lacked if they had gone out in cold blood. Later on this mimed hunt became formalised, that is to say, certain gestures, sounds and movements, were abstracted from the naturalistic representation and developed into symbols and patterns which signified the dance at a higher level.

The same magical idea appeared again when man began to till the earth and extract his food from it. Certain ritualistic dances were evolved, with rhythmical chants, intonations and spells to make the rain fall and the sun shine so that harvests might grow in profusion. Our ancestors believed that there were spirits behind the mountains, the river, the sky, the rain, the wind, the trees and the earthquakes, gods who had to be appeased with offerings of songs and eatables, because otherwise they might overwhelm human beings with disasters. These invocations to the gods, both beneficent as well as the dread deities, were acted out, not by single individuals but by the whole tribe. Many of the hymns in those first books of the world, the Vedas, are pleas to the gods for bigger and better harvests, for an abundance of vegetation and for an increase in fertility all round; and, from a great deal of the later poetry, it is obvious that the tribal dance, enacted the yearly victory of the spring over winter, and to earn blessings, by circling round, even like the seasons, with an ecstatic intensity such as alone could move the indifferent and the exalted Gods.

As the tribe danced with a single will, the sheer excitement of rhythm caught hold of their simple imaginations and they were fitted with the joy of their own strength and movement, the joy of creation. And soon if one person showed greater skill in the dance he would step out into the middle and lead the others, while some of those who were tired out sat down to take a hand with the drum, or to clap and sing to the beat of the dance, watching the play of words and gestures like an audience. The flow of emotion passed from the actors to the seers and back, and gradually it was discovered that some members of the tribe had greater talents than the others in representations of scenes and could stir up emotions in the audience at will, rouse them to

love or war or make them laugh. And in the interplay between the actors and the audience the theatre was born.

The skill of the actor seemed to the tribe of divine origin. Naturally, therefore, the actor began to arrogate to himself the functions of the priest and evolved a symbolism and a technique of which he was the unique custodian, playing to them as well as interceding on their behalf to the gods; and he felt the treble thrill of creating something in himself which was other than himself, communicating it to the audience and to the gods. Once he had tasted this strange power he did not easily relinquish his hold on the community.

But the alteration in the balance of the means of production which took place when the nomadic tribal life yielded to a settled existence and the other such changes that followed, made men less and less dependent on the gods and more and more inured to a belief in themselves—in their own hands and feet and their wits in the fetching of bread and water. And the growth of the city state, the nation and world society enabled man to believe still more intensely that he could shape his own destiny. The gods began to be conceived as made in the image of man rather than the other way about. And the actor began to celebrate the deeds of heroes, of the ideal men in whom the gods had become incarnate. Drama then became impersonal and concerned itself less and less with the external supernatural fate than with the conflicting good and evil among human beings. And thus the theatre grew, till it came to be the individualistic commercial art which it is today in the bigger cities of the world.

All the old forms of the drama did not die out, however, but they survived in the dances of the primitive tribes, and also in the ritualistic dances, pageants and tableaux of temples, as well as in the several dances and mimes practised throughout the festivals which celebrate nature myths in our villages, or in the enactment of the heroic deeds of our ancestors through the recitation of romantic narratives, as well as the plays which enact the victory of right over wrong. The *Ras* or *Nautanki*, the *Ram* and *Krishna Lila*, the enactment of the victory of the Pandus over the Kurus, the *Muharram*, the *Holi* as well as the several harvest dance-dramas, are the apotheosis of the old drama, survivals which are an important reservoir of energy from which a new living

art of the theatre can be refurbished. For we have to begin almost at the beginning and come full circle if we are to build up an indigenous tradition rooted in the soil and in the consciousness of our people who have remained, despite all the civilising processes they have undergone and despite the sophisticated classical city dramas, and below the surface of codes and inventories, the custodians of certain elemental forms from which no sudden leap into the future can be attempted but only an integral advance made if we are to develop a national drama rather than merely the superficial, smart middle-class comedy as it is known in Western Europe and America.

3

Does this merely mean that we can return to the grunting and howling of the primitive man or resurrect the simple dance dramas of the past and be content with this revivalism in the iron age? The answer is no, for we cannot put the clock back even if we wanted to. All that is implied here is that we cannot be content to import the smart comedy manufactured in Europe during the machine age under circumstances very different from those under which we have grown to awareness today. But that we have to seek inspiration in the vitality of those impulses which have persisted in the sub-conscious strata of our culture, that is to say among our people, who have lived close to nature in all the processes of history and remained unaffected by the currents which first moulded these into sophisticated forms and then led to the decay of the classical and city drama of about two thousand years ago.

Let me explicate this point further:

If there is one general fact which may seem to explain the decay of sensibility in the city theatre, it is probably the puritanism which began to seep through our bones when the mediaeval codifiers and grammarians damned the floodgates of creative art by a hidebound criticism. The soulless formalism with which they tabulated the moods and emotions atrophied those very moods and emotions, and for centuries there has been nothing left to us but the memories and scattered remnants of the classical tradition so far as sophisticated drama is concerned. But no people can live merely by weeping over the ruins and exalting the graves. Life asserts itself. Only, when puritanism and decadence become

allied with nihilism and despair born of slavery, and art becomes removed from the people, it needs nothing less than an upturning of the social order to create a new art.

It is no use denying that today the theatre, as well as the other arts, are looked down upon as somehow dirty and contaminating, unfit for the association of the sons and daughters (especially the daughters) of respectable middle class citizens.

Of course, there have been dirty plays and dissolute players and the same tradition which ensued the sanctity of the wife forced the courtesan or the whore to provide entertainment. But this perverse morality did not always poison theatrical art. In fact, the moral urge, which has now turned sour, supplied the inspiriting ideal to the early drama. For, as I have shown above, play acting began as prayer: our ancestors chanted in unison for plentiful harvests or when they were intent on the resurrection of the King hero and wished to gain immortality. The old drama was thus rooted in ritual and not in entertainment as such in the way in which it has come to be in our own time. And in its later development the play universally enacted the victory of Life over Death, till the fun of this enactment by itself survived as an aesthetic ideal. Throughout the folk play religious observance remained the driving force. And purpose has been most pronounced even in the clowning between the acts of the morality or miracle plays. The actor has forever been presenting what the people wanted to see, the revenge over evil and the triumph of good. As, however, there can be no showmanship without music, paint and lights, naturally the pleasure of the senses has remained an integral part of the village theatre, but it is morality none the less. And this is so still in our folk as well as city drama. For we have come late to industrialism and have not yet evolved an extensive middle class interested, like its European counterpart, in the escapist comedy which shows who should go to bed with who: and because our long struggle against tyranny and oppression has kept art forms closer to the people. And, as I have insisted, whenever drama has been nearer the people it has sounded the moral note.

Now, it is obvious to some extent why we must derive enthusiasm from the folk forms, what motives we should take from them and how we should develop them self-consciously till we achieve the natural curve of drama from the simplest to the most

sophisticated. But it will be easier to understand all this if I take certain surviving folk forms and show exactly how they are being transformed.

4

There are not wanting examples of how a number of pioneer men of the theatre have already begun to mould a new tradition out of the old. A great deal of the dance drama perfected by Uday Shankar at his Almora centre, as well as the shadow plays he created after his first revivals of interest in the dances of India, are a case in point. *The Rhythm of Life* was, for instance, an amalgam of motives taken from the rich storehouse of the people's memory and transformed through the organisation which Shankar had borrowed from Europe. And much of the work of his colleagues like Shanti Burdhan in *The Spirit of India* and *India Immortal* ballets, as well as in the *Holi* and *Ram Lila* dance plays, owes itself to the principles developed at Almora. The adaptation by the various language groups of the Indian People's Theatre Association, of the ancient *Tamashas* and *Powadas* in Western India and the folk forms of Andhra illustrate the same process.

In this context let us take the surviving folk forms of Andhra in South India and see what use has been made of them by the People's Theatre.

The main forms current there were as follows : (1) *Burrakathas* (bardic recitals and folk songs); (2) *Harikatha*; (3) *Veedhi Natakam* (or open air dramas); (4) Regular plays; (5) Choruses.

Burrakathas, or bardic recitals, were the most popular of all folk forms. The context of these was generally supplied by a racy poetic and prose narrative like the *Ballad of Venkataramani*, the boy who bit off his mother's ears. The usual *Burrakatha* group is composed of three people, one of whom is the principal singer. He begins the narrative as a leader, while his other two companions supply the chorus effect, all of them using the long Andhra drum, as accompaniment. The mode of narration is punctuated by significant pauses in order to heighten the dramatic effect of the story, and the musicians occasionally take a few steps forward, or circle round to the rhythm of the drum at appropriate moments during the narration to emphasise certain emotions or rather to round off certain passages of the story.

During the prolonged decay which marked the history of feudal society, when the position of the village bard had become reduced to that of a mere hanger on at the nobleman's court, the bardic recital became the heritage of the beggars (who went from door to door singing for a skulful of rice) or the most disreputable elements of society. But I have had occasion to see how the groups of the I.P.T.A. in Andhra have rescued this form from the ignoramuses who practiced it as a formula and how, by composing new ballads with fresh social content, they have combined with the natural vigour of the old form a new urgency of conscience, without diminishing any of the gaiety and joy which is inherent in the form itself. I shall never forget how three peasant boys held an audience of thirty thousand citizens of Guntur spellbound up to the early hours of the morning with their recitation of the Ballad of Venkataramani, the bad boy who bit off his mother's ear. The newest ballads composed for *Burrakathas* display a variety of thematic content from the life of the peasants to social reform and the Bengal famine. But the form is specially suitable to the telling of heroic stories.

The traditional use of the *Harikatha* was for the narration of stories from the epics and the pauranas. Song, prose, poetry and dance were all interwoven by the artist who was called *Haridas*, servant of Vishnu. The People's Theatre groups have taken over several *Haridases* and written up popular themes of everyday life in the convention of the *Harikatha* narrative, thus retaining the purity of the old form but making use of it to extract pathos from audiences used to the strict metrical verse.

Singing mendicants are a common feature of life in India, but they abounded in Andhra, dressed in strange garbs and wandering over the land, fortune telling selling medicines, diagnosing diseases and generally exhorting people to be good and charitable. Here, as in dealing with other folk forms, the I.P.T.A. has retained the old style but changed the content. Instead of diagnosing bodily ills, the mendicants now diagnose social diseases; prescribe appropriate methods of healing, particularly insisting on an incision here and a major operation there, and rousing the community to action. The fortune teller now foretells the fate of whole peoples and nations in terms of social analysis. And the mendicant's role is reversed, in so far as now he preaches the social



Mask Designs by George Keyt

morality of concerted endeavour, and not personal retirement from the problems of the world.

Veedhi Natakam, or the open air stage, seems to have been used by itinerant dramatic troupes for ages in the villages of Andhra. But with the coming of modern Western drama, with all its paraphernalia of elaborate stage sets and footlights, the convention fell into disrepute in the eyes of the more snobbish town dwellers. The taboo was further encouraged by the movie. But, as in the neighbouring Tamilnad, where the open air play *Teruvukk-kootu* was popular the Andhra open-air stage employed a highly developed technique like the *Kathakali* of Malabar, being only less complicated in regard to the make-up of the actors. Now this is forming the basis of the modern play. A play called *Hitler Prabhavam*, the downfall of Hitler, was written in this *Veedhi Natakam* style and was an enormous success. And the Andhra groups have been able to build up a repertory of several plays since, which have been performed to vast audiences.

Kolatam, the popular folk dance of Andhra, was like the *garbu* of Gujarat, a vigorous and muscular effort. This and the more feminine *Lambadi* and *Bathakamma* dances are now being used as the basis of dance dramas and ballets, which retain the costuming and the steps of the original but evolve patterns which can awaken the aesthetic catharsis at a higher level than was possible to the merely isolated performers of these dances.

The flood of energy which has been unleashed by the improvisation of the ancient village forms to bring joy, enlightenment and amusement to the people by the Andhra progressives, has rendered possible an enormous output of new writing, and no cultural festival is complete in that part of the country without an extensive repertoire which shows the old wine being poured into new bottles. And these shows afford inspiration and joy to thousands who had nothing but the drab routine of the open field to fill their lives with during the eras of feudal oppression.

To me the energy and seriousness with which the Andhra I.P.T.A. have transformed their folk forms is an example of what could be done in the other linguistic zones. I say this because I found a return to reality in the Andhra improvisations which was not merely in the excellence of the mimed execution, but in the impression that it gave me of being completely integrated, as

though the plays I saw had, with their new content, been going on for years. There has not yet been achieved the exact synthesis in their recitation of dramatic poetry, for they have not worked out how much visible representation is essential to the narrated poem, but they hold the promise of a vital theatre in what they have already done, including I hope the highest achievements in regular drama where the will is conscious of itself and successfully battles against all the obstacles, be they the natural 'fates' of classical thought or the evil in men and the conflicts and torments as conceived by the modern world.

5

The particular theatre in India which has gone a great deal further on the way to realising this, though without going by way of the rejuvenated folk form, is the Bengali stage, although this is somewhat of a paradox, because Bengal had a much richer folk tradition than any other part of India. But, as I have mentioned before, that part of our country was the first to receive the impact of British rule. And through the land reforms of 1795 known as the Permanent Settlement Act, by which a landlord class was created standing between the Sarkar and the tenants, a middle section of the absentee landed gentry arose in Bengal, popularly known as the Bhadra log, which began to be increasingly out of touch with the peasantry—the reservoir of folk culture. As in politics, so in the arts, Bengal, therefore, developed a highly talented city culture, located mostly in Calcutta. And this culture more easily borrowed the influences which came from Europe, specially as the alien government initiated an education system in a foreign language and propagated the superiority of Europe in everything to the detriment of the Indian tradition.

Already before the battle of Plassey an English theatre was in existence in Calcutta and Warren Hastings is mentioned as one of its subscribers. At this Calcutta theatre sparkling comedies like *The School for Scandal* and *The Beaux Strategem* were staged under the direction of one Mr. Massinck, said to have been sent out to India by David Garrick himself. At first the female roles were taken by men, but, following the example set by a Mrs. Bristow, women were later introduced. Only the rich native landlords were admitted, apart from the English, to the portals of this holy of holies.

Similar English theatres were founded variously by a Russian adventurer named Herasim Lebedef, by Prof. Hayman Wilson and others; and English classics, mainly Shakespeare and the 18th century dramatists, were presented to the rich.

Under the impulse of these theatres the landed gentry of Bengal gave private shows of which one of the first was the popular mediaeval drama *Vidyasunder*, enacted by a cast of men as well as women, in the house of Nabinchandra Basu in Sham Bazar.

After this, the idea of applying European stage conventions to indigenous material spread and the amateur theatre flourished, fed mostly on English and Indian classics. Some attempt was made at a synthesis. In the opening scene for instance, it was not the Manager, but the *nata* (actor) and a *nati* (actress) who appeared, to deliver a kind of prologue to the play, and the scenic representation was improvised in a form which was symbolic rather than realistic.

The exalted private theatres, lavishly financed by the gentry, flourished, and original plays, on the English model, began to be written, like *Is this Civilisation?* by Michael Madhusudan Datta.

Girishchander Ghosh launched a regular National Theatre in 1872 with a professional company. And many of the later theatres like 'The Star', 'The Minerva', 'The Manmohan', were modelled on Ghosh's effort. The repertory of these theatres included Pauranic plays, rewritten to suit new conditions, adaptations from Shakespeare, historical and social plays. And highly skilful writing began to be produced, such as the plays of Dvijendralal Ray and Rabindranath Tagore.

In spite of the deep inroads made by the foreigners into the lives of the Bengali middle class, the intelligentsia reacted sharply against the rulers and led the movement for national self-awareness right until the end of the first world war when the Gujarati middle class, led by M. K. Gandhi, wrested the leadership of the struggle. And, through its reaction the upper layers of Bengal were able to resurrect their own language, their dress, their habits of life and traditions finally from the superficial imitationism of the first impact. Rabindranath Tagore, whose life work as a writer coincided with these developments, went further than most in his dramas to emancipate himself and, by implication, Bengali

literature, from the spurious and mechanical influences of English forms. Self-consciously, he evolved a highly developed, technically efficient style of his own in dramatic writing which owed not a little to the folk culture of Bengal. But a great deal of the fantasy and poetry which he brought to his playwriting was individual to a detached temperament whose experience of life was limited and highly abstracted through the rigours of class affiliation, of poetic narrative and conceptual thinking.

The one great contribution of the British impact had been the opening up of well-equipped theatres in Calcutta. And here, apart from Shakespeare, who enjoyed a great vogue in the many adaptations of his plays into Bengali, the work of many indigenous dramatists was enacted. But the themes continued to be taken from the old Pauranic stories with an occasional dash of the revue cum tragedy cum farce cum opera, which took off contemporary manners and customs. Towards the early years of the 20th century, however, the social revolt was already in the offing. And it had its repercussion on the arts in the production of plays like *Nildarpan* on the conditions in the Indigo plantations of Eastern India.

The tradition of the Bengali middle class stage, therefore, was the only vehicle in Bengal until just before the beginning of the second world war when a strong wave of anti-fascism was maturing. It was, however, during the war that the merging of the Progressive Writers' movement with the Indian People's Theatre Association in Bengal led to a new orientation of theatrical art.

In 1944 was produced the play *Homeopathy* written by Manoranjan Bhattacharya, a professional actor and a dramatist of distinction. And in the same bill was Bijon Bhattacharya's *Jahandandhi*, together with the poem entitled *Madhubanshir Goli* by Jyotirendra Moitra.

It was the Bengal famine which shook the whole country that produced the greatest spurt of theatrical activity in Bengal. Under the stress of this exigency was produced a play, *Navanna*, which will remain a landmark in the history of the Indian theatre, for the extraordinary heights it touched as sheer art, the perfection of scenery, costume, acting and the general organisation having coalesced to produce lasting memories and a deep stirring in the country.

Navanna, or New Harvest, was written by Bijon Bhattacharya and produced by the author in collaboration with Shambu Mitra, with the assistance of Manoranjan Bhattacharya and Gour Ghose. The theme of the play, which is in four acts, is the life of a Bengali peasant during the harrowing famine when three million died from starvation and disease. The critic of the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* wrote about its first performance 'Nothing can be more topical and therefore more difficult of artistic treatment, especially in the form of a dramatic performance as a famine. For the first time since Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nildarpan*, a truly peasant's drama has come upon the Bengali stage.' Another paper said: 'This is the real picture of the people—the underdogs in the background of the August Movement, flood, famine and epidemic. It is not to be praised for its novelty alone—its value lies in its capacity to create a sense of fellow feeling for suffering humanity.' 'The play was performed before large audiences not only in Calcutta, but in the Mofussil areas and invitations poured in from the countryside because all the artists were not in a position to leave Calcutta for more than a day or two at the most.'

The last sentence taken from a report about *Navanna* is significant, however, of the problem which faces the Bengali theatre: It is primarily a city stage without much connection with the villages, except that in this particular play, as in Jyotirendra Moitra's song drama *Naiajibuner Gan*, songs of new Life, the theme deals with the peasantry. The treatment too was, on the whole, in the realistic technique bequeathed to Bengal by the European influence only barely touched by the influence of the indigenous village theatre. Therefore *Navanna* is a *tour de force* which derives its force from the mingling of the old Indian forms with the modern styles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It may be the originator of a new tradition in drama.

But the realistic modern technique of the city theatre is bound, if it is not informed by folk feeling, to end up either in sheer naturalism or in the virtuosity of the sentimental tragic-comedy of the middle class theatre. An emphasis on technique as such, as in the American and English theatre, leaves one with the feeling that all the energy of electricians, costumers, property men and set designers, is of no avail if the core of the theatre is neglected, that is to say, if there is no living contact between the actors and

the audience which in the cities has been dulled by cynicism and snobbery. In my opinion only a constant going back to folk feeling which is rooted in the real life of our peoples, can bring a genuine sense of reality to our stage.

The Bengal movement is reorientating itself in this regard. For there have been a few performances in the *Kabi Lada* form of recital. In this a band of village poets, with folk instruments like the drum, form opposite parties and wage wordy duels with one another, the leaders of the two bands composing impromptu verses and discussing subjects of moral import. It is possible to use this form as the Andhra I.P.T.A. has done, in wordy wars on topics of burning import and to develop the humorous as well as the rhythmic possibilities of these bands as a chorus effect, by weaving them into the modern play.

6

The next most highly developed theatre in India was that in the Mahratti language which arose mainly in Poona and Bombay. Like the Bengali stage it began mainly under British influence but soon emancipated itself and rendered up a considerable drama, which is both good written literature as well as fairly actable. Beginning with Vishnupanth Bhave, who wrote on amorous and pathetic themes a number of experimental plays which rationalised the old mediaeval performance and led to the formation of a professional company, the Bhave players, there arose the Aryoddharaka Company in Poona, the Maharashtra Company and the Shanunagaravasi Company. The repertory of these ventures was the mixed grill preferred in the early theatres of Bengal. But if it is remembered that Mahratta power was still a dominant feature of Western India till the middle of the 19th century, one can see how the Mahratti stage became soon imbued with national self awareness. Historical plays about the famous Mahratta heroes from Shivaji downwards began to be written and presented. As these were banned the Mahratta dramatists invented subtle strategems to present their point of view in allegorical fantasies or in farcical comedies. And there was evolved the humorous social play, a speciality of the Maharashtra stage. Later, under the influence of Ibsen and Shaw, Mama Varerkar wrote social plays in a realistic style where a synthesis between European convention and Indian content was attempted. As a leading contemporary dramatist Varerkar gave a tremendous

lead to the younger groups which have been recreating the Maharashtra village theatre through the *Powada* and the *Tamasha*.

Under the impulse of the young actors a Mahratta worker wrote a play called *Dada*. He portrayed in this piece the day to day life of the Bombay workers, their sufferings, hardships and frustrations with an authenticity born of grim experience and with a humanity characteristic of his class. The audiences were thrilled to see their own everyday lives put before them so clearly and seemed to be deeply moved by the realisation that they could alter the conditions of their lives through their own strength.

7

The example of Bhave had greatly influenced the Parsi Community in Bombay. Rich, talented and easily adaptable, because of the lack of a cultural tradition of their own, the Parsis took up both Gujarati drama and the Hindustani stage. The essentially practical bent of their mind, however, put commercial success above artistic achievement and they soon succeeded in vulgarising every theatrical effort. That they produced men with rich histrionic talent there is no doubt, but the lack of a language of their own made it impossible for them to develop drama which could survive the years. And yet they occupied the theatrical life of India for more than half a century, with the Alfred, Madan and Balliwala companies, performing mainly in Hindustani, plays which were either adaptations from Shakespeare or amalgams of socio-historical-musical content, and which petered out in the pathetic, decadent displays of the imitators of these imitating Parsis.

The real Gujarati theatre arose, however, as a reaction to this vulgarity

Ranachodhbhai Udayaram was disgusted with the low *pot pourri* presented in the Parsi owned and run theatres of Bombay and began to render and adapt the Sanskrit classics. He wrote a popular play called *Harishchandra* and then a social tragedy. After him a school teacher called Narottam started an amateur company and then three business men founded the Gujarati Company. Later, there arose The Bombay Gujarati Company of Dayashanker, 'The Morbi' of Oza and 'The Doshi' of Dahyabhai Dholsha through whom the modern Gujarati stage arose.

The fact, however, that the Gujarati middle class is mainly commercialist led them, after a little while, to ape the Parsi

vulgarians and the new ventures ran through the gamut of pseudo-historical, Pauranic and English adaptations to ultra-romantic thrillers and ended in the low social farce. Under the weight of all this sensationalism it is a relief to come across the new plays of K. M. Munshi who had a ready pen and attacked old social practices. Unfortunately, however, there is a lack of intensity in Munshi's writing, and his vagaries as a politician have brought his literary work little response from the public. Mrs. Munshi's one act plays are, on the contrary, much admired, both for their sincerity and polished writing.

C. C. Mehta, a highly talented Gujarati dramatist, has gone much further than any other writer from his linguistic group in bringing into the written play the kind of idiom and technique which may perfect the modern Gujarati drama. His play on the life of the railway workers, *Ag-Gari*, has become an important piece in the repertory of the *Avant-garde* theatre. Mehta has a very efficient knowledge of technique, particularly influenced by his knowledge of the gadgets of the radio, and he can juggle with his theme, mixing tears with laughter and suspense, through his intense awareness of people. And he deliberately sets out to instruct and moralise in the Shavian manner as in his play on the life of the Gujarati poet, Narmad. But the popularity of his plays among the low priced seats in the auditorium shows that he writes through an alliance with common moods, for nowhere in the world can one touch the core of the pit unless one is instinctively connected with human emotions. Certainly, he has done more than any writer to resurrect the drama, from the abject servility of the Gujaratis, to the upper middle class culture of Bengal by a return to the living experience of Western India. Furthermore, he seems to have taken Goethe's advice: 'He who would work for the stage should study the stage.'

An attempt towards a Hindustani theatre was made by Imanat who wrote his play *Indar Sabha* at the behest of Wajid Ali Shah, the Nawab of Oudh, and enacted it at the court with the Nawab in the main role. Ever since then, however, the disruption created by the British impact on India, which inhibited the growth of the theatre in all the language zones, strangled it in the areas wherever it had any roots.

Actually, the situation in the Hindustani speaking zones was potentially a very fruitful one. For, although a great many other arts had flourished at the courts of the Great Mughals, the theatre never enjoyed any vogue there, because of the general Islamic taboo against the re-creation of human form on the stage which is interpreted as usurping the functions of the Divine creator, the progenitor of the world. Only in the villages, among the peasantry, the pageantry of the garland of festivals which decorates the year, both Hindu and Muhammadan, kept the folk forms of *Nautanki* and *Ras* alive. The poet, Imanat, seems to have drawn very largely on this, but no other dramatist arose who could express the consciousness of a 'destiny' which soars above circumstances through facing them.

The Parsis, who re-created the Hindustani stage, though starting under the impulse of Imanat's *Indar Sabha* and the copious adaptations of the Elizabethans, soon made the theatre purely a business proposition. The Balliwala, Alfred and the New Alfred Theatrical Companies of Bombay, as well as the Madan Theatre Company of Calcutta, all distinguished themselves by commercialising the theatre on the familiar formula of 'Give the public what it wants', which, as usual, meant titillating the people with songs, jokes, *bon-mots* and sensation-mongering to them, with ham acting and the crudest melodrama, and generally giving the audience their money's worth through the chief actress, often a fashionable courtesan. And, for two or three generations, the main provider of drama remained, apart from the anonymous adapters of Shakespeare, a hack called Aga Hashar Kashmiri, a third rate poetaster whose stock-in-trade was the blood and thunder melodrama, with a dash of morality sufficient to get into the skin of the vulgar part of the audience and send them home happy and supposedly high minded.

The pure drama of the more sensitive writers like Abdul Halim Sharar, therefore, became more and more literary while the Commercial stage merely decayed till the film and the talkie came and sealed its fate.

The more sensitive minds of the younger generation of Hindustani writers could not but be shocked into an awareness of the inexpressible misery of our people, groaning under foreign rule and feudal and religious impositions. And, as the develop-

ment of democracy in the West, and particularly the Russian Revolution, showed that their own dreams of a good life for the people were possibilities, they began from their different angles to tackle the overpowering tragedy of Indian life. And a new poetry and prose were born, arising from the dejection of the soul, but intent on Struggle. Nor were they daunted by the ineffectuality of much of their efforts in a country teeming with disasters. The notion of Struggle itself became for them the chief catharsis, the elevating circumstance.

There is no writer under forty today who will deny that at one time or another he did not subscribe to the dominant influence of the Progressive Writers' Association, which was formed in 1935. And the movement which this body generated has unleashed a tremendous amount of poetry and prose in which the conditions of our existence are constantly related to the extreme limit of possibilities.

The mainstream of this movement met the corresponding theatrical current, which had started from very humble beginnings in the Indian People's Theatre founded by Anil de Silva, a young Singhalese woman writer, in Bangalore, but which has matured in the vast network of I.P.T.A. branches all over the country.

The chief language group of the I.P.T.A. is the Hindustani group. And the most consistent writer of this group has been Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, whose chief contribution, a play entitled *Zubeida*, enjoyed a terrific popularity among audiences both in Western and Northern India.

Zubeida is the name of a girl from the United Provinces who is stirred by the dirges of the funeral processions during a cholera epidemic, and the spirited songs of the relief workers outside her house, to cast away her veil and join the volunteers. She dies, like many other people, through the lack of an anti-cholera vaccine. Abbas made a conscious attempt in this play to unite the public life of processions with their chants and slogans with the private life of the Muslim household, and he tried to create almost a new form of drama very akin to the living newspaper. And I think he demonstrated one way out of the theatrical debacle, that is to say from the peasant play towards the documentary theatre. *Yeh kis ka Khoon Hai?* a drama by the young poet Ali Sardar Jafri is distinguished by its poetic approach. And the short one

act play of Ismat Chughtai, *Dhani Banken*, as well as the many other pieces give evidence of a ceaseless experimentation which is going on in the I. P. T. A. cadres for a new form, though as yet there is no sign of a genuine synthesis having been achieved.

The recent productions of adaptations based on Gogol's *Inspector General* by Hind Manch and the Irish play *Remembered Forever* (*Desh Bhagat*) were highly successful efforts in tapping the real emotions of Indian audiences, with their incipient reserves of laughter in the face of the extraordinary anachronisms of our society, but the influence of the European three-act play seems still dominant without real awareness of its technical possibilities.

By far the greatest contribution to the Hindustani stage, however, has been made in recent years by the actor-producer Prithvi Raj Kapoor, with his two productions *Deewar* and *Pathan*.

With an uncanny theatrical instinct Prithvi Raj seized upon certain memories of village life as it was presented in the *Ras* of North-West India and, rationalising several motives of the folk play, he has knit them into the framework of two modern plays dealing with the contemporary theme, communalism.

Deewar describes in a fabulous form the transition from the good life of the old India to the misery which the foreign invaders brought into our lives and the wretchedness which was perpetuated in our land by their divide and rule tactics. The two brothers, who lived happily with the whole village community, are gradually estranged and ultimately a division of all the property is forced, signified by the wall which is created to divide the house. This barrier is ultimately destroyed when the peasants revolt against the misery and hunger following the partition and the two brothers are reunited.

I am afraid that moving as is this play, and a fairly good example of the community spirit informing the three act drama, the bad stage sets and indifferent costuming destroyed the illusion to a great extent, though its vitality and urgency was not lost upon people who have been flocking to see it now for almost two years.

But no Hindustani play that I have read or seen has impressed me with its integrity quite as the simple, starkly beautiful and elemental drama of the life on the frontier, entitled *Pathan*.

The story of the friendship between the two families of a Khan and a Hindu nobleman portrays the deathless loyalty which is the essence of the code of honour of this part of the world, even as the exaction of the ultimate penalty by those who have a feud which these two families witness, to the evil inherent in this relentless society, an evil resulting from the fact that the enemy of the Khan was a Khasadar paid by the overlords. The tenderness of the relations between the two households, and in their relations with their servants and retainers during birth, marriage and death, is unfolded in a pageant which is almost documentary in its realism, except that a certain romanticism creeps in through the very love for the graces of the feudal life against which the blood-sucking cash-nexus values are contrasted, by implication here, as they were explicitly contrasted in Prithvi Raj's earlier production *Deewar*.

The rhythm of the play is slow, especially in the beginning, but that was perhaps inevitable to an attempt to portray a simple life in which things do not happen so easily and which depends less upon wit from moment to moment as upon the inexhaustible vigour of the characters presented in the round, with their strengths and their weaknesses and with an inimitable dependence on the reality of life itself. But, throughout, with its beautiful setting in the little castle home of the Khan (what a terrific improvement on the sets of *Deewar*!) a subtle doom is built up, the inevitable progression from happiness to tears, the catharsis of disaster. The audience knows, as it becomes involved in the talk and the sports of this household, its piety and its good sense, as well as its follies, that the beautiful life cannot last. And the nemesis comes surely when the Khan sacrifices his own son as an appeasement for the shooting in self-defence by the son of his friend, the Hindu nobleman, to the enemies who want to carry out the feud according to the formula, 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'.

The point which I want to make, however, is that in so far as the poetry of the tension between good and evil remains incipient here and the overt balance of justice adjusted, this play is a morality. And yet in so far as evil prospers and the good characters suffer as victims of God's justice, this drama is reminiscent of the Elizabethan stage. But to the extent to which certain individuals emerge, who question the Mullah's interpreta-

tion of the religious code and even upset the traditions of the old society, as by taking to education, this drama is verging on the modern. Altogether, *Pathan* stands with the Bengali play *Navanna*, on the cross-roads of the old and the new traditions, and it is equally revolutionary as it presents our Indian life with an anxious regard for aesthetic values which brooks no compromise with the tawdry habiliments of the fake Balliwala theatre.

And it is curious that, because Prithvi Raj has an instinct for life, 'he does not fall a prey to the cheap Americanism of the comedy which many of our smart Alecs regard as the be-all and end-all of the theatre, but he unself-consciously includes all the political and social struggles which are taboo on Broadway and in Shaftesbury Avenue. Politics is part of ethics to Prithvi Raj and the courage with which he goes straight to the heart of the conflict makes his productions a not insignificant part of our struggle for cultural emancipation.

The irony of the theatrical situation in India is however shown by the fact that the second biggest city in India cannot provide an adequate theatre. There is an Indian National Theatre, which has produced some plays in English by the young actress Hema Kesarcodi, but it is a theatre only in name, having no building to call its own and no permanent repertory company. Prithvi Raj Kapoor's productions have, however, given a great fillip to theatrical life among the middle classes, while the younger I.P.T.A. groups have helped by taking simpler forms of drama from the peasantry and giving them to the peasantry.

It is this dual programme that may build up the ground work for a theatrical tradition in our country. For we have to go to the middle classes, garbed in costume, and show how ridiculous they are and we have to go to the poor dressed as the poor and lift them up with their own cries till their calamities become incarnate and compel a change of heart in this sad world of ours.

I feel that that is a truth which applies everywhere. For, not only do the peculiar exigencies of India require the conservation of the two main techniques which appeal to the two chief layers of the population, but that the synthesis of the two will bring us to the fundamentals of a new kind of theatrical expression, drawn from both. The community technique of the folk theatre, which may be impossible to re-create in its old form, could lend many

conventions with which the three-act European form could be revitalised, specially the community spirit, so that drama becomes a joint effort of the actors and the audience. Thus may be achieved the stage which Lope de Vega had in mind when he wrote: 'The company...was like some faces, not a perfect feature in it but, because of the harmony with which they were united, the face was beautiful.'

There is no lack of inspiration in the remnants of the broken tradition of our theatre. Always in our country the place and educative value of drama in soul culture seems to have been recognised. Training of the emotions and control of the body were aimed at. The actor deliberately handled and expressed feelings and emotions and in the process his body became the vehicle of certain moods, often remaining possessed and yet unaffected. A clear intellectual perception enabled the actor to display emotions without being affected by them and thus learnt to handle emotions as they welled up in actual life. Now, though we cannot gain much by reviving the formalism of the ancient theatre, it is likely that we will gain enormously by inquiring into the craft of the old theatre in comedy, tragedy, farce as well as in the morality play.

And as we adapt our knowledge of the survivals of the old folk theatre to the needs of today, it is possible that a new indigenous tradition of the Indian theatre may be built up which is unique to our country and which may contribute something different to the hackneyed forms current in the contemporary European theatre.

THE DANCING FOOT.

The Role of Imagination in the Dances of India.

To Ram Gopal

*The dancing foot, the sound
of the tinkling bells,
The songs that are sung and
the varying steps,
The form assumed by our
Dancing Gurupara
Find out these within your-
self, then shall your
fetters fall away.....”*

(From Vision of the Sacred Dance)

There are certain moments in which one's experiences of an art form lifts one suddenly from the merely incidental to a vision of beauty and leaves a permanent mark on the mind. I remember one such moment when I saw the Santhal dancers near Bolpur, Bengal, come dancing from their villages into a fair at Shantiniketan.

The tiny Santhal villages lay tucked up in the folds of the ochre-coloured hills, like neglected flowers on the ends of the earth. A slow dusk was falling gently on the vast expanse of the countryside making everything look small and insignificant against the glory of the sky. Suddenly from somewhere at the bend of the red road, the faint drum-beat of a Mridang became audible. Soon the music spread out like the branches of the Mahua tree behind which it seemed to be located, like the heartbeat of the world, palpitating with a terrific primitive fear or yearning as it became more insistent. And, then, lo and behold, there emerged six men, linked arm in arm, and six women similarly enchain to each other, dancing. The men would advance in rhythmic steps towards the women in the glow of torches held by attendants, while the women facing them withdrew in rhythmic steps to the tune of the heartbeat of the world that sounded from the drum. And even as the two groups thus danced they progressed slowly up to the fair. And behind them came other groups dancing the same dance, while a small bamboo flute now piped out a plaintive note above the urgent notes of the Mridang. And all night they danced the same rhythmic dance, a monotonous, gentle, sinuous dance, obviously erotic in the 'toings' and

'froings' of the groups of men and women, and in the peculiarly subtle hip movement with which they punctuated the 'toings' and 'froings', fascinating to the onlooker, like a 'dance macabre', exciting in the extreme and almost final in the impression it made on the mind.

I remember other ecstatic moments. The time when I saw the Dogra hillmen from Kangra dance their violent war dance. And the first sophisticated, highly organised *corps des ballet* of Uday Shankar, with its repertoire of the classical dances as well as the folk dances. And the unforgettable vision of Ram Gopal's solos, with his lithe brown body weaving delicate arabesques and assuming hieratic postures pregnant with hidden meanings.

Lotuses spring up from under the feet of our dancers, the groupings dissolve like flower petals falling away in the deep blue of the Indian night. The gods walk about and brood before swinging their many arms and their powerful heads in fits of destruction. The humans throb to the beat of the drums or ally themselves with the lyrical grace of the cool, clear, translucent music of the flute, the vina or the sarangi, like water dropping from a mountain spring.

'And what is it all about?' the ordinary spectator, asks. 'Where does it get you?' Or, as the initiated may put it, 'What is the nature of the excitement which one feels in the presence of these dances?' 'What are the peculiar qualities of Indian dancing?'

Of course, our ancient Indian method of explaining these things is a poetic one. The art of dancing arose when the god Vishnu killed the demons, Madhu and Kailatiba. Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, noticed the graceful movements of her lord and asked to know what was indicated by them. Vishnu told her that they constituted the art of dancing. So that other people may enjoy the benefit of his skill, at Lakshmi's instance, Vishnu disclosed the secrets of the art of dancing to Brahma, who imparted it to Rudra, Shiva, enabling him thereby to acquire the title of Nateswara, the Master Dancer. Shiva, it is said, entertains his consort Parvati, every evening in his mountain abode in Kailasa, in the presence of all the gods and goddesses, who often join in the community dancing and singing to enhance the splendour of the evening dance known as the *Sandhya Tandava*.

One hundred and eighty different styles of dancing with different names are enumerated, and one hundred and one are described in the fragmentary work of the sage, Bharata. In the decorations of the outer gate of the Gopuram of the Shivaite temple at Chidambaram in Madras, there are ninety-seven stone panels, with the names and descriptions of the various poses, around the bas-relief figure of a dancing girl dancing with the appropriate, graceful disposition of limbs, indicative of the actual movements required in each stance.

From this kind of myth we may be able to get a dim idea of the inner character of Indian dancing. But the immensity and depth of the gulf between the past civilisation of India and the present modern world in which we live, makes it difficult to grasp the subtleties of an art form by merely recounting an old fable. In the last two hundred years we have become so used to the immediate, outer approach that we tend to trust only what our eyes see and what our ears hear. Equally, it is no use for our professorial interpreters of the dance to paraphrase the *Bharata Natya Shastra* and content themselves with saying, as they so often do, that the dance is a 'spiritual thing' and nothing else whatever.

Of course, the dance is a 'spiritual thing'. But how and in what sense? If the 'spirit' is all, that is to say, if the only objective of the dance is to attain God, then the only dance posture which should be presented should be that of a yogi sitting in a contemplative stance, in the perfect stillness and the calm where all movement ends. And there is no need for showing anything else on the stage which might, by the intrusion of the bodily with its form and movement, cast a blemish on this perfection.

But I suspect that it is the very blemishes in art that people love best, the weaknesses that show the curve of aspiration through which man reaches after an idea, that appeal to our own weaknesses. And it is only when a dancer seeks to infuse his personal, individual vision of a codified movement that we are really moved. So that there is no such thing as a perfect execution of *mudras* according to an heiratic canon. Rather it is, in spite of the laws of the dance, the transformation of the body through the *imagination* by which a dancer becomes the mood or

the passion he dances, by which he achieves the communion with other men, that constitutes the art of the dance.

And from this it is obvious that our dances are neither the mere sensationalism of Europe calculated to titillate jaded appetites, nor the perfect stances of the sculptures in Madura, but the product of earthy peoples who were affected by the surroundings in which they found themselves and sought to master their environment through magical movement or ritualistic practice, and who knew how to live, to eat well, to drink tastefully and to enjoy themselves in this, the only world, even though their aspirations were for a heaven in Mount Kailasa. For enjoyment is inextricably connected with art—joy is the core of it. And I cannot see that, apart from the conditions which control art, first in one century and environment then in another, why even our intelligent and cultivated people often try to blind themselves and each other by talking either like the proverbial professor or the superficial lady visitor to the exhibition.

If we are not too self-conscious about our three thousand years old cultural tradition, and want to grasp the significance of our Indian dancing today, the facts are simple enough.

It is true that the tradition of our dances is different from that of Europe. For instance, as Mr. Adrian Stokes once put it, the postures and movements employed in Eastern dancing express the introverted building up of an inner strength by almost suctional movements which draw man into himself and absorb even the life of animals and plants, thus increasing his own human dignity and exalting himself to a Godhead, while Western dancing mostly expresses exegesis, explanation, frankness and a broad and generous expenditure of energy. But the common quality in all dance is imagination. And in so far as we seek to overtake, with language or gesture, the hitherto unexplored potentialities of experience, in so far as we glimpse the meaning of what was only vaguely understood before, in so far as our minds and hearts light up with the vision we had hoped for, we are in the presence of great art whether it is subjective absorption or objective dissolution.

A friend of mine confirmed this for me the other day. She told me that on the Gopuram of a temple in South India, she had seen the image of Shiva dancing with one leg raised at right angles to



Mudras and Poses. Designs by S. Chavda

his body, the upper half of his torso twisted in a rising, spiral movement and a strange smile dawning on his lips. Many years later, she saw this movement and posture executed in quite a different context by Anton Dolin, equally effectively.

If it be admitted then that the secret of the Indian dance lies in the imagination, how about its technique, its outer habiliments.

It seems to me that an impressionistic view of Indian dancing would lead one to define it as the motion of a body according to a definite rhythm and a consciously prepared grammar of steps and gestures in the service of a theme chosen beforehand. And its chief characteristic is the skill of the dancing foot itself i.e. the footwork. Next comes the suggestive power with which a particular dancer can plumb the hidden depths of the psyche, with which he can release the subconscious world of our race memories bringing intimations of ourselves, or our ancestors, moving to the winds and the stars, fighting among the rocks, harnessing rushing waters and appeasing the spirits of forests, dread deities and beneficent gods. The range of expression was strictly prescribed in the classical dances through well-defined mudras or gestures, which were symbols of certain moods and emotions but always interpreted and informed by the genius of a dancer, whether he is the strong handsome male or the beautiful female. The degree of coordination of the dancing foot with music is the essence of this art, while the other arts of architecture, painting and penmanship help as handmaidens. And the synthesis of all these bears a deep relationship to the spirit of man, to the whole of his nature, aspiring from imperfection to perfection through a constant effort at awareness, as in the life-process itself.

Of the classical dances there are four well-known surviving forms, the subtle *Bharata-Natya* and *Kathakali* which are current in South India, the lighter *Kathak* and *Manipuri* which are popular in the North and North-East.

The *Bharata-Natya* style, which is the oldest and most perfect of all, is associated with the ritual of the Shiva cult as practised in the temples of the Southern peninsula. It was generally danced by *Devadassis*, slaves of the gods, trained from early childhood. Therefore it has come to be known as *Lasya* (soft), or feminine, as against the *Tandava*, masculine style. It is mostly performed solo

and very rarely in groups. The elaborate and complicated symbolism makes this the most difficult form to master and comprehend, even as its interpretation by a self-conscious dancer like Rukmini Arundale, with her cadences of restraint, makes it highly esoteric and poetical in expression. The architecture of the Shivaite temples dominates it, impressing on it a richness of detail and intricate variety of expression not to be found in the other dances.

The *Kathakali* is the classic dance pattern of the Malabar coast. As against the *Bharata-Natya*, which is mainly *Lasya*, feminine or soft, the *Kathakali* is *Tandava*, masculine and vigorous. It is impressive for the fact that the whole body is involved in its rhythm. The dancers of the poet Vallathol's Academy are the most consistent exponents of it. But connoisseurs will remember Ram Gopal's interpretation of the peacock dance which is a well-known item of the repertory of Malabar.

The *Kathak*, which originated in Lucknow is distinguished by its broad eloquence, its higher tempo and speed. The footwork here is, however, not so brisk and there is an air of monotony which recent interpreters like Menaka have tried to remove by using it for group dances.

The *Manipuri*, the dance of Eastern India, is like the *Kirtan* music of Bengal, a vivid but fleeting aerial phenomenon, lyrical like a tune and lacking in the contrasts of tempo, speed and movement which distinguish the other dances. The dancer alights upon the stage like a shooting star from the firmament, snatching the quick of human emotion and rising again in a sudden leap, to fall again and rise again.

Apart from these main forms there are the numerous folk dances, the living receptacle of influences from the classical tradition, but more richly human and spontaneous in their expression than the dances of the canon, in so far as they took in all the social, heroic and ritualistic impulses of the peasantry. The erotic Santal dance in Bengal is matched by the simple socialised *Saraikali* dance which interprets stories from the *Ramayana* in Bihar and Orissa, and by the *Banjara* dance of the Deccan, in which women clad in gorgeous scarlet robes dance in a circle in unvaried steps yodelling a monotonous tune the while.

While these indigenous styles flourish autonomously in the various parts of India, there has been going on in our country a

self-conscious attempt to synthesise the technique of our ancient and traditional dances with, what for lack of a better word, I may call, the showmanship of the European ballet. As in any such synthesis, there has been a tendency towards artificiality. But, already through the exertions of Menaka, Uday Shankar, Ram Gopal, Rukmini Arundale, Gopi Nath, Shantha Rao and the Indian People's Theatre Central troupe, and the various dance centres they have founded, dancing in India is no longer merely revivalist. Indeed, today, it is a flourishing art of which the various schools are their own unique and independent interpreters, a chorus of men and women whose inspiration has overflowed the bounds of the classical convention and got nearer to the actual human affections, the pains and joys of our country. The dancing foot is harnessed to the service of man, the rebel, reaching out from the world as it exists around us to the world of his dreams.

'IF MUSIC BE THE FOOD OF LOVE'

A Conversation on Indian Music between an Indian and an Englishman.

To Narayana Menon

One knows so well that anguished expression on the face of an Englishman when he hears a note of Indian music, even as one recalls one's own frustration and embarrassment on hearing, for the first time, a bar of European music. The reactions in both cases can be summed up in a single word: noise. I so well remember how at all house parties an English poet friend of mine and myself used, during charade time, to do an amusing act, with the Englishman mimicking an Indian vocalist's 'ain wain wain,' and me miming the throaty, full blooded 'Kiii.....Kaad' of an Italian opera singer! And the general attitude of this friend of mine was summed up in the phrase which he pronounced as soon as I put on a gramophone record of an Indian classical singer: 'If music be the food of love, please, please stop it...'

One day, after the first frivolities, my friend and I discussed the reactions of the two sets of opposing auditory nerves, that is to say, those of an European and an Indian, to Indian music. And quite a few things were revealed about the music of our country. As many people, I know, even among my own compatriots are, like my English friend, unaware of the elements which go to make our music, I put down below a dialogue based on various conversations I had with my friend, because it may give basic information and thus stimulate interest in the technique of our music.

M. R. A.: I think, Philip, that it is important in appreciating any art at all to shed one's prejudices and preconceived notions which one unconsciously inherits from the locality from which one springs. And it is important, in this question of the difficulties of receiving foreign music, to give the music a chance.

P. H.: It is quite true that one must be adventurous enough and submit, however painfully, to the experience of things one does not understand. For instance, I had no ear at first for our European classical music until a school master put me through the paces and made me listen to Beethoven and explained to me the basis of harmony and orchestration.

M. R. A.: Well, you won't be surprised to know that just as many Europeans cannot appreciate anything but jazz, many Indians, because they have been alienated from their own tradition and have not acquired the European, cannot understand any music at all. I had the good luck in my early youth to hear some of the professional hereditary musicians who performed in the Sikh Golden Temple at Amritsar, but it was difficult even for me to learn to appreciate Indian classical music, until I became friends with an H.M.V. agent who often regaled us with new gramophone records and asked us to the recitals by the famous musicians when they came to do recordings in his Studio. Similarly, I began tentatively to listen to European classical music there. But, inspite of this, for a long time European music seemed strange to my ears, till I began to queen up outside the Queen's Hall in London—

P. H.: I suppose geography helps greatly. Perhaps the only way in which I shall ever really begin to appreciate Indian music will be if I go to India and hear your musicians.

M.R.A.: Possibly, though, as I know from the way I learnt to appreciate European music, that music is more intensely local, national and racial in character than most other arts, such as painting which expresses the artist's intentions through colour, or literature which expresses emotions and ideas through words. For music is not a language with easily comprehensible symbols.

P.H.: What about songs? I see that the words of a song are not the music of it.

M.R.A.: Quite. The music is not in the words but in the lilt of the words, in the style of sound, or the musical idiom, which is made up by scales, modes, range and tonal quality of voice and the instruments.

P.H.: But the effect of a foreign lilt or style is so instantaneous on the emotions that I simply feel impatient at the first sound of Indian music...And all those nasal sounds,

wails, shrieks, screams and that awful repetition in the throat!—They make me impatient.

M.R.A.: I sympathise. I know I had to face the same difficulty with European music, till I lent my emotions to it and found myself swaying to its rhythm or beating time with my feet and allying myself with the conductor's baton. Afterwards, I began to use my intelligence and read about it.

P.H.: Perhaps it would be better to apply cold intelligence and to make the effort to suppress the emotional response?

M.R.A.: You mean listen and not merely hear—well, if you like to approach it that way do so, but I would say that it is necessary to both hear and listen.

P.H.: Is it true that the main difference between Indian and European music is: that while your music is lyric or melodic, ours is based on harmony?

M.R.A.: A critic like my friend, D. P. Mukerjee, would say no, not quite. It is not a question of melody versus harmony, he would say, but of emphasis. And, being an historian and sociologist, he would deny that essentially there is much difference. Because he rightly insists that, as music began everywhere as ritualistic chant and developed as a handmaid to religion, there was a great deal in common between Indian and European music until the 15th century, that is to say until the time when Europeans discovered the key board of the tempered scale which helped to replace voice by the use of instruments and opened the path to harmony. And though in India, too, voice began increasingly to be subordinated to the instrument, even to be replaced by it about the same time, India did not, because of its moribund social structure, change over to the tempered scale but stuck to the chromatic, contenting itself on mere decoration and refinement. D. P. considers that while European music is melody grounded in the tempered scale, with distinct and clear intervals separating two consecutive notes, the Indian style glides from one note to another. This does not mean, however, that there are no harmonic devices in the playing of Indian instrumental music.

P.H.: My chief difficulty is the quality of tone adopted in Indian vocal music. Our own vocal music is so smooth, with its clear head tone, that we take it for granted as the only style possible, while your music seems so harsh.

M.R.A.: It may seem so at first, but it has an unmistakable clarity of its own as the theme develops, for it has a fairly well defined scale consisting of seven notes semi-notes and several ornamental variations known as 'kuns'—

P.H.: Tell me about the scale and its variations?

M.R.A.: They are seven in number. Therefore they are collectively called 'Saptak'. But individually they are known by the initials Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni, which are abbreviations of the sounds Shadju, Rishabha, Ghandara, Madhyama, Panchama, Dhaivata and Nishad. They are supposed to be notes of absolute pitch and many fanciful interpretations are given about them. For instance, it is ingeniously alleged that as the cry of the animal tends to be of a fixed pitch they derive from animal sounds. Sa is thus said to be the sound produced by the peacock in its highest ecstasy; Ri is the sound made by the cow calling her calf; Ga is the bleat of the goat, Ma the cry of the heron or the roar of falling water or of the cumulative weight of the jungle; Pa is the note of the nightingale; Dha is the neigh of the horse, and Ni the trumpeting of the elephant...With the additions, they make twenty-two notes, for apart from the seven constant notes (which though different are also related to each other) there are several intervals smaller than semi-tones and so subtle as to be almost inaudible to the insensitive ear, and 'kuns' which are indefinite variations of a decorative character originally obtained by slightly shifting the trets of the solo string instrument. Each one of these has its individual character, such as soft, pathetic, bright etc. And, of course, there are an infinite number of permutations and combinations possible between them. The whole scale is a comprehensive and subtle system and is the basis on which the several *Ragas* are built up.

P.H. I didn't know that the scale was so well-defined and comprehensive, because to me the whole thing seemed to be improvised.

M.R.A.: Our music does seem capricious, because it is not composed and depends to a great extent on the skill of the musician to give his individual interpretation to any *raga* after he has mastered the skeleton of the scales.

P.H.: And what system of unapproachable constellations are these *ragas*?

M.R.A.: The *ragas* are certain melodies with a fixed predominant note and sequence of notes and certain other well-ascertained attributes. The knowledge of these modes has been handed down in our country from father to son through the generations, and they differ slightly in the North and the South. But there are about seventy-two primary *ragas* and about eight hundred secondary *ragas*. The scales and even variations of all these *ragas* are fixed. For instance, the lovely *bhairavi raga*, a plaintive mode, usually has an interval of three semitones between the second and third and the sixth and seventh which give it its peculiar character. Sometimes, however, a genius like Tan Sen, the chief musician of the Emperor Akbar, may alter the character of a *raga* by giving new variations, as he did in the *raga malar* by introducing into it elements which were not in it before. But such innovations are only permissible to rare artists, because the modes are a kind of fixed grammar. The individual performer may, however, bring the intensity of his own feeling to his interpretation of a song while singing it according to a certain mode, though the modal basis, the fundamental tune, remains constant. Thus he starts on the curve of an unbroken melody and, gathering many notes and variations, with the recurring tune always persisting even at the cost of monotony, goes through its ecstasies back to the original cadence from which it starts. And the charm of these *ragas* is that they are associated with different hours of the day and can only be sung at the appropriate times. For instance, the *bhairavi* is for the early hours of the

morning, the *kafi raga* is sung in the evening and the *malar raga* in the rainy season. And each *raga* further symbolises a mood or passion and has been frequently illustrated in painting by certain visual stories. *Bhairavi*, the *raga* of asceticism is, for example, illustrated by the picture of Shiva in Kailasa, deep in meditation; and the *raga vasant* is visualised in the forms of Krishna playing with his maids in the warmth of spring...Another fascinating thing about the recital of these *ragas* is the way the musician decorates the song after he has established the modal basis by shooting off into some intricate variation through what is called a 'Tana', and which is a series of notes articulated by the voice very much faster in tempo than the basic song, without the use of words...This is a highly skilled business and can only be performed by musicians after long and persistent voice training, so that no nasal sound enters into the recital and the whole is intoned with depth and ease. Thus intonation is the secret of successful melody—

P.H.: This is all most fascinating. I did not realise that there were such intricate laws binding your music.

M.R.A.: The misconception arises because our music is not composed. Actually, there are very adequate key relations.

P.H.: I suppose there is a timing to the whole improvisation —I mean the measure.

M.R.A.: Yes, it is called *tala* and it is fixed even more strictly than the *raga*. Of course, it is not written down or set, as is the time measure of European music, but it is learnt by the musician early until the rhythm becomes part of his personality. To sing or play out of *tala* is considered highly vulgar. There are about fourteen modes of *talas* current in the country. All music is divided into measures consisting of a number of syllables, with the stress falling at regular intervals. The duration of every beat is of equal length. And there are three such beats, the strong, the medium and the weak, the first of these being the most important. The beat is registered on the *tabla* drum which is an absolutely essential instrument

in any recital of Indian music, the *tabalchi* being thus the hub of the whole performance, the source of all rhythm. The *talas* are worked out with a scientific exactitude, but the rhythms are distinguishable if one listens attentively.

P.H.: Do you mean to say that if I learn to listen I could follow the rhythm, as well as the tempo?

M.R.A.: Of course. And you will be able to discover the three speeds: slow, medium and fast. The Indian musician usually begins slowly and then works up the tune with great dexterity, the masters showing a remarkable control of voice, a tremendous virtuosity of utterance, an uncanny range of individual improvisation and coordination with the instrumentalists.

P.H.: Oh, tell me a little about the instruments?

M.R.A.: Well, there are a large variety of them, including about twenty-six kinds of string instruments, eighteen wind instruments and over two hundred and fifty kinds of drums—besides the western harmonium which most good musicians consider a plague but which a few have adapted fairly well to their purposes specially for vocal music. Most of the various instruments are very ancient inventions and beautiful in design and workmanship. For instance, among the stringed instruments, there is the South Indian *veena* consisting of a 'peashaped bowl', hollowed out of one piece of wood and with an intricate arrangement of strings and frets which makes it specially amenable to the subtle and sinuous beauties of Indian music. It is generally held across the knees, though sometimes in a slanting position on the shoulder, and it is manipulated with the fingers. The *tambura*, another stringed instrument, is more popular in Northern India. It has four strings attached to a wooden frame with a bowl at the base and produces a steady drone as a background to the vocalist, helping to keep him in tune with a fine exactitude. The *sarangi*, generally used by wandering minstrels, is the Indian equivalent of the violin with a mellow tone. It can be used both for solo performances and



Ragini (About 1680-1700)

as an accompaniment. Then there are the *sitar* and *dilruba*, two particularly graceful string instruments; the former is more or less like the *veena*, the latter is like the *sarangi*. Of the wind instruments the most popular is the *bansari* or the flute, which is associated with the divine singer Krishna and the lyrical notes of which suddenly surprise one in the oddest corners of India. And there can be no music without the *tabla*, the drum, on which the *tala* or the beat is kept up, two of these usually being played by the same drummer, one with the right and one with the left hand.

P.H. : If there are so many instruments then there must be some kind of orchestration and composition in your tradition.

M.R.A. : No, I am afraid that there is nothing put down on paper except, lately, when Rabindranath Tagore made an innovation by doing some notations. Nowadays, people are, of course, taking to composition. As for the orchestration, this is difficult because of the tradition for improvisation by the masters without which Indian music would become, as it were, 'mere sound and fury' ... Actually, however, the seeming absence of any law, pattern or design is soon quelled if you listen to a recital. The whole group of musicians, the master as well as the accompanists, sit cross-legged on a dais before you. And, after the instruments have been tuned, the vocalist begins with a kind of prologue, or overture, if you would like to call it that, technically called *alap*. Through this he introduces the main aspects of the *yaga*, which he is going to develop afterwards, that is to say he indicates its scale, its special notes and its unique character. The *alap* is not sung to *tala* (or beats) but to *laya*, a kind of broad rhythm which sets the definite pattern of the mode. The vocalist mounts this overture on certain nonsensical sounds or words such as *tum*, *tana*, *ne*, *te*, *tire*; and, slowly, his voice gains volume, deriving strength from the deep notes produced by the chest or abdomen, even as it acquires speed imitating the stringed instrument, like the *veena*. The effect of *alap* is like that of an evocation of the divinity or the soul which

each *raga* is supposed to possess. And the best way to get used to Indian music is to listen to the *alap* again and again, because it can show in essence all the concrete as well as abstract qualities of the various styles of Indian music—

P.H.: What?—styles of Indian music? The whole thing is so complicated that I give up.

M.R.A.: If your enthusiasm did not flag during all these explanations, you will bear with me if I name the most important styles.

P.H.: Please go ahead.

M.R.A.: Well, there are four or five main styles: *dhrupad*, *dhamar*, *kheyal*, *thumri*, *tappa*, and to these may be added the folk forms *bhajan* and *kirtan*. All these are associated with different parts of the country, and certain definite rhythms are associated with them, as also certain instruments, because some stringed instruments lend themselves more to one style than to another.

P.H.: Do you know that though I have absorbed many of your explanations what I wish for is for some printed notations, some manuscripts through which I can recall a melody after I have once heard it. And, surely, such printed music will have some value for comparative study.

M.R.A.: As I have told you, under the inspiration of Rabindranath Tagore, a host of Indian and European scholars are busy rendering up our music. There is the classic work of Bhatkande and Vishnu Digambar. And there have been some wonderful notations done by Mr. Arnold Bake; and Dr. Narayana Menon has popularized Indian music in Britain and created a good deal of interest in it. And I think you will find a fairly good bibliography on Indian music in the important world libraries....But to catch the spirit of our music one must keep alight the flame of one's enthusiasm and listen. For, as in painting or sculpture, the printed explanation can never be as rewarding as the picture or statue, so music is best understood in terms of music itself.

CINEMA OR CEMETERY:

The Future of the Film in India.

To J. B. H. and Hilla Wadia

Some time ago, a friend of mine said to me: 'Come and see one of our new Indian films.' I had been confronted on almost all the hoardings at the street corners by so many lurid posters advertising new films that my curiosity had already been aroused. The splashes of paint on the long frontage outside the Queen's Road cemetery had particularly impressed me, for one can't help making the obvious metaphor. Not that one is habitually inclined to indulge in cheap jibes. But after all that one has seen and heard about our Indian picture-making, one is inclined to feel that those great, big daubs may, indeed, like the colourful shrouds on the bodies of the departed, be hiding all the death that there is in the industry. Still, as I had been thinking of visiting a cinema, off I went with my friend, one afternoon, to see a film in a picture house near Chaupati. I will not name the film, in view of the peculiar sensitiveness of our picture-makers against criticism and the rigorous laws of libel which hide mediocrity in our country. The theme was the eternal triangle. So let us call it: 'Three of them.'

The sea breeze sweeps across the Chaupati beach nimbly and the sun's glare is sieved by the greenery of Malabar hill. That corner of land, skirting the bay would seem, therefore, to be an ideal situation for a cinema or a theatre house. Unfortunately, however, the styles of architecture preferred on the sea front are not such as to bring the full benefit of Bombay's natural assets to the people who live there.

The cinema house to which my friend and I went shared the defects of the neighbouring buildings. With bunches of imitation grapes intermingled with the tawdry statues of Ganeshji Maharaj, as well as of the owner of the house, which protruded from its facade, it seemed an ugly abortion conceived by someone obsessed by an unconscious passion for sur-realism. Still it was not too lacking in other amenities. There was a beautiful lawn in the front garden. And here people sat around, eating pea-nuts, roasted gram, chewing betel leaf and smoking, spouting red gore across the pillars of the hallway and crushing the flower beds. Now and

then one of the Seths, seated on a bench, would rise suddenly, seize his nose between the thumb and the fore-finger of his right hand, blow it noisily on the ground by the iron railings where the four anna audience was queuing up, as though to show that he was above the common herd, and then sit back and sprawl about like a rhinocerous.

We had arrived about half an hour before the programme began. We had succeeded in buying the tickets from a tout or someone, who took pity on us when he saw us left behind in the scramble for tickets, as a swarm of people crowded round the Box Office window with upraised hands and shrill, eager voices, only to find a black board announcing 'House Full—no more tickets'. My friend, who had to pay a commission to the tout for the privilege of being able to buy tickets, told me the facts about the black market in the cinema ticket trade. Apparently some of the cinema companies deliberately drive tickets into the black market and refuse to sell to the potential audience in order to create a bigger demand for their pictures. For, if it gets about that *Savitri* or *Dur-i-Bulak* is running to capacity and has been booked for weeks in advance, then an artificial demand is created and people flock to see the show, however rotten it may be, and the company is then in a position to advertise that their picture ran for sixty or ninety weeks and broke all records. I understand that some companies do not mind even running at a loss, so long as they can earn the necessary goodwill of the public with black market tactics, because they hope to reap the benefit of popularity with their subsequent pictures. The chief reason for this complicated attempt at inflation is, my friend told me, the whip hand held in the industry by the distributors, who will not buy a picture for their circuit, or circuits, if they think it is not what the public wants.

'How much our producers and distributors must love the public!' I said.

We both looked as though we had really come, not to the cinema but to the cemetery. And time passed slowly, and the sweaty heat, the belchings, spittings and nose blowings seemed to become more and more unbearable.

At last the doors of the cinema opened. And lo, a flood of humanity shot out of the four anna seats and met another flood

at the door. Shouting, pushing and pushed, hurtling, falling, the people who had seen the performance were straining to get out of the hot-house, and the people who were going to see it were anxious to get in and occupy the best seats. Nobody could hear the peremptory voice of the attendant at the door. And the tussle was prolonged almost into butchery—from the screaming and the shouting, it sounded more like a slaughter house than a cinema or cemetery.

We found ourselves literally lifted off our feet, my friend and I, thrown across the seats some distance away from each other. And it seemed to me a miracle that we escaped being hurt. The operator took an unconscionably long time before he began to project the picture, and I beguiled myself by thinking that he was giving us time to recover from the arduous struggle which had been necessary to get in. Patience is supposed to be an Indian virtue and we never fail to test ourselves and our fellowmen, lest we should fall from the great heights of calm which our Rishis have enjoined on us!

The film began. And it turned out to be what I had expected, a putrid, 17th rate imitation of the cheapest and most vulgar Hollywood triangle romance, except that the lovers broke forth into song at the least little excuse, songs of joy at the sight of a daisy pushing its head out of the earth, and dirges, laments and long-drawn pleas at every inconvenience and delay that the villain of the piece, a vamp, put in the way of the meeting of these heavy hearts. How should one analyse the antics of the college boy hero, dressed in a natty sports jacket and narrow trousers, with a bow tie like that of Winston Churchill which nearly choked him as he sang. And how could one sympathise with the weepy, fat, little heroine, when all that one wished for was: 'Oh that this too too solid flesh should melt!' Doubtless, the whole picture had been manufactured by a producer in three months for a company in which some Seth had invested two and a half lakh of rupees.

Now there has been in India, ever since the days before the war, a growing dissatisfaction with the film industry which is reflected in the gestures of despair we all make as soon as we begin to talk about films. Some people just throw up their hands and

roundly declare that the situation is hopeless and that they cannot do anything about it. Others protest against this or that aspect of the film industry or criticise the theme of a particular film, the shoddy spots interspersed in it or the cutting or editing and the disposition of its various parts. Still others cannot put their feelings into words at all. But the issue is seldom joined and there is nowhere that I know of any comprehensive statement of the history of the Indian film industry, with a detailed criticism about how far it has succeeded, or failed, in fulfilling the needs of our contemporary Indian society.

On a higher plane the situation is somewhat similar in America and Britain. The cinema kings of Hollywood and Denham consistently proclaim, with truly regal and benign condescension, that it is their aim to 'give the public what it wants', that they seek to offer just a little 'passing amusement' to the much-harassed peoples of the world, that they love their audiences too much to want to put any ideas into their heads. The distributors are in a chronic state of nerves about giving an audience a film about real life. The cinema owners abhor any film that does not decorate the fronts of their chains of Odeons with the most glamorous stars, with ever new Gods and Goddesses. The vast majority of audiences are by now conditioned to the deliberately narcotic aims of the average gorgeous production, and openly confess that they go to the flicks to dream that they are all Bette Davies or Gary Coopers for an hour or two. The movie has come to be a church, with its new modern ritual, conducted through Jazz songs and splashes of colour—its invitation is pure entertainment, its influence is propaganda and its final aim is abandon to the silken dark!

Nevertheless, under the attack of the intellectuals in Western Europe, and through the example of the Russian film, the cinema in America and Britain has had to move towards integrity and realism. Not only does it have to have some semblance of truth, even though it is only through a phoney realism, but before the war there was a goodish proportion of honest commercial films such as *Zola*, *Pasteur*, the *Good Earth*, *Scarface* etc. Recently in Britain there has been produced *Henry V*, surely one of the most beautiful films ever made, opening the way towards greater achievements in the future.

There is a special need in India, however, during the maturing of our renaissance for us to think more clearly about the film, for if the film has come to be accepted as more than any other art, the art of the people everywhere, it is more particularly the art of the people in India. Our masses have been kept illiterate for so long that with the text book and the radio, the cinema can become one of the three most important organs for educating our vast populations quickly. No one can expect our half-fed men and women after a hard day's labour in the field or factory, to go to a school organised by the proverbial village schoolmaster. But if they were offered the prospect of resting back and seeing a film they would not only be refreshed by what they see, but learn to read and write as well as to absorb knowledge. The fact that the imagery of the average uneducated man is visual rather than conceptual makes the film peculiarly fitted to be the art of the masses in India.

But what is the nature of the problem before the film makers? How can we plan our film production so that it comes to fulfil the pressing needs of our society? How can we rationalise the film industry so that it becomes a major instrument for the entertainment and well-being of our people?

It is increasingly coming to be recognised that film production owing to its very nature, its costs, its complex distribution structure, and its social and cultural influence, reflects very clearly the state of the economic society in which it finds itself. Unlike literature and art, which from the very subtlety of their dialectic, do not necessarily coincide with political periods, the film, as well as the radio, have a more direct relationship with the social currents of any particular time. For instance, in a war, most films tend to do immediate propaganda, even though they be the flimsiest musical films, whereas novels seem to have larger aims since they take in the whole life of a time.

Now there is a strong minority of film producers who, though they take tips from the state in war time, do not wish, in peace time, to make films which reflect the life of the people. They insist rather on making films which may lull human beings into the kind of complacency through which the dominant aims of a minority of privileged men can be propagated insidiously or otherwise. In some cases large-scale work, either dramatic or

epic, can be forced through the normal channels of production where the creative pressure of the advance guard is particularly strong. But more often than not progressive people have to adopt other methods of keeping the balance between low pressure vulgarity and high pressure art.

One of the methods, which has been successfully employed in Britain and France is for a group or unit of like-minded aspirants, anxious to prove their creative abilities, to collect a little private money and to make a dramatic film on economic lines with a minimum of studio work. This, if successful, forces its way into the normal market by its cheapness and originality. A good example of this is the film of Toller's play *Pastor Hall*, produced by two young boys at the fantastically low cost of three hundred pounds sterling.

The second method, more frequently resorted to, is, with a modest economy, to make a 'short' of about five to fifteen minutes which is usually non-dramatic and frankly propagandic. It is often like a magazine article or essay and sometimes like a realistic poem. The general term applied to it is 'documentary'. And through the genius of some of the world's greatest film producers, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Flaherty, Grierson, Rotha and others it has come to be a very fine instrument for education in the world today.

For various reasons the big producers do not make shorts or documentaries. Before the war, even in Britain, the home of the documentary, the market was shrinking fast because of the growing custom of cinema houses to show two feature films in one programme with the addition of a newsreel and a comic cartoon. This double feature programme, adapted to attract falling audiences, and to expand it to fill the newly built super cinemas, proved to be so costly that there has been a movement on the part of the monopolists to return to the single feature. This may mean that the demand for short films to fill out the programmes will arise. Already, however, the fact that the documentary became profitable in war time, made many of the big film makers turn their attention to it and they began to court the independent maker. But even at its best the partnership between Big Business and the sensitive artist is an uneasy one.

There are, however, other ways of circumventing the dominant structure, and of bringing integrity to the film specially applicable to India.

It is possible, for instance, to interest existing social and cultural bodies such as Railways, Air Lines, Commercial Companies and Government Departments to subsidise documentaries, not necessarily to advertise them but to bring out the ideals of public service implicit in their ordinary functioning. The public for these films will be limited. And, as the piper who calls the tune is usually a committee or a liaison officer, more expert in doing conventional propaganda and less concerned to try out a novel method of publicity like the film, the prospects of such film-making in India are not as bright as they ought to be. But the example of Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*, made for the Ceylon Government, of Grierson's film for the British General Post Office and Steinbeck's *Mexican Village*, done for the Republic of Mexico, as well as the shorts about India executed by the Burma-Shell Unit, prove that in any enlightened society the technique of the film is appreciated and its functional aims are recognised.

Another way of breaking out of the vicious circle of the commercial film, which may come to be accepted in a country like ours, is the co-operative method. Cheap co-operative shares, equivalent to entrance tickets, could be issued to a large public for a projected film of national importance likely to have a mass appeal. An additional subsidy could be asked for from the Government if it is a Government which expresses the people's will. The well-known producer Renoir in France tried out this plan with his film *Marseillaise* before the war. But, I believe, that our people, who give so many purses to our political leaders for good causes, could be appealed to for funds by honest documentary units, and I am sure that our traditional sense of community would evoke the necessary response. At any rate, the principle involved in this method informed the attempt of the Indian People's Theatre film *Children of the Earth* and may lead to the foundation of similar units all over India.

The documentary shorts promise much. They can fit into existing structures and, being cheap to make, can be used experimentally without serious loss in case of failure.

This brings us to the implicit theme: the relationship of the documentary and the dramatic film.

The documentary has proved a field for experiment for the fledgling technician. Not infrequently the commercial cinema daringly takes over some of the new ideas. I doubt whether the innovators have been ready enough to sacrifice their personal moral satisfactions and permeate the dominant cinema in the way they might. Nevertheless, the thematic content of their films has had a considerable influence. I refer now not only to documentary but to the independent cinema in general.

Its material tends to be that of everyday life. Engine drivers are preferred to periwigs. Apart from progressive principles, engine drivers are cheaper to produce. So the lead to what one might call reality comes from the makers of documentary and other independents, and their work enlarges the store of thematic material available for the commercial artist. They educate the public towards engine drivers and away from periwigs. Not, of course, that a film full of periwigs need be 'unreal', or that engine drivers or fishermen deserve a monopoly as fodder for the film creator, but it is obvious that the documentary, springing from a minority both of makers and viewers, is not only good and desirable in itself, but a healthy influence on the cinema generally, now or potentially, and that for India there could be no better sign than a flourishing school of realist documentary films to permeate the whole conception of Cinema. Whatever the future, work done in this direction cannot be wasted.

The history of the pre-war film in Europe and America showed clearly that the makers of the commercial dramatic films and the makers of documentary do not mix. The commercial film was usually spendthrift, grandiose and vulgar, while the documentary, with its specific aims, was technically highly proficient and emotionally and intellectually satisfying. During the war there grew up, side by side with the increased output in documentaries, a new synthesis which may be called the feature documentary or the documentary epic like *The Foreman went to France*, *Mrs. Miniver*. Unfortunately, the I.F.I. Unit in India did not have the same influence on our ordinary film production.

But I feel that the development of the feature is also of the highest consequence to us here. Because, while we shall have to produce hundreds and thousands of shorts to tackle the social problems of our country directly, we cannot do justice to the

rich, sensuous and colourful life of the Indian continent without involving the creative imagination in the solution of all the outstanding issues. We have the vast literature of the classical era, as well as the new modern and folk literatures to draw upon for theme and content. This has, of course, been attempted and, in fact overdone, for the religious, historical and mythical narratives, were 'safe' in a country where a feudal cum petit-bourgeois morality have mingled to produce the most rigid taboos and to what is or is not respectable behaviour on the screen. But one is not asking for the mechanical kissing, cuddling hedonism of the western movies to be introduced *ad hoc* into our films. What is desired is that contemporary sensibility be reflected on our screen.

What exactly do we mean by this? We mean that there should be reflected on our screen the most intense impulses and ideas of our people, so that the rich full life of striving and pain and happiness in our country can be sincerely interpreted. Already this kind of sincere attitude has already been brought to our films by New Theatres in *Hamrahi*, by the I.P.T.A. in *Dharti-ke-Lal* and by Uday Shankar in *Kalpana*.

Only in the attempt to bring such sincerity, there is need for collaboration among the small band of honest people in the Indian film industry, producers, actors, as well as writers, so that they may tilt the scales a little in favour of good ideas rather than always compromise with the aims of the commercialists. It is inevitable that many of the finest talent in our industry will have to mount the cross in the effort to create a high pressure art of the film. But there has never been a cheap victory for the advance guard anywhere. And we have to pay the price, if only because the intoxication of an art of the highest calibre is often adequate recompense for the artist. There is, anyhow, the call of the vast, missionary effort we need among us to build a new future for this art. The poetry of our ordinary life, the bent of our peculiar temperament, the love of the Indian sensibility for metaphor and its spiritual insight are our great assets—assets of the highest significance to human society. And if we refuse merely to imitate Western forms but seek, as in the theatre, to create a film art which synthesises our own sense of values with the very best of European technique, we may make film history.

There are some other incidental but highly important aspects of the cinema in India which must be remembered at this juncture. We all know that the present set up of the censorship is undemocratic and must go if we are to work and breathe freely. Then there is the scarcity of adequate literature on films, by which I mean not only the books that may help technique, but also independent cinema magazines which may, without fear or favour, give frank reviews of films in India and stimulate discussion on every aspect of the industry. Also, there is need for film societies all over India which may sponsor the showing of good films such as are not commercially shown in the ordinary cinemas and which may influence the taste of the people for better films.

The cinema, everyone knows, is a tremendous power. Let us wield this power in the service of humanity.

THE VOICE FROM THE BOX.
Some Observations on the Radio.

To Lionel Fielden

I remember so well the first shock of surprise and pleasure that the emergence of the voice from the (radio) box gave to our peasantry, a shock quite different from that caused by the phonograph, because there was no braying horn attached to it and sound ensued from it merely at the touch of a few wires. I happened to be in a little village in the Punjab on the day that the radio was installed in the school for the benefit of the whole village. The oldest inhabitant of the hamlet nearly passed out on hearing the uncanny monster speak out from behind the delicate netting on the box. The cows and buffaloes scattered away. The dogs barked. The chickens flew. And the eager peasants, young and old, thronged round the schoolmaster and myself as we manipulated the gadgets and tuned in to various stations of the world. One of the greatest single revolutions in the auditory nerves of India happened on that day; and I felt that it was only the harbinger of many great changes in the technique of living of our people; for, being illiterate, I felt they could learn the many things they wanted to know through the naked ears at the same time as they could get their entertainment. Several of the old fogeys were literally persuaded by the more mischievous younger men to have their ears cleaned in order to hear better. But, alas, the voice from the box betrayed them. For when the first curiosity was appeased, and they waited for instruction and amusement of the kind which we promised them, there only came from the box highflutin voices, speaking in English or in exalted Hindustani, about matters which had little or no connection whatever with the lives of the villagers! And thus one of the most persuasive of the mediums for the enlightenment of the people failed to keep the interest of the peasants and became merely a gadget for the few indifferently educated men of the countryside to tinker with for a while on a Sunday evening for their own delectation and that of their immediate friends.

The voice from the box was introduced nearly twelve years ago. But, inspite of the fact that the All India Radio has grown from its modest origin to be a giant department of the Government of

India, with nine stations each covering potentially as enormous an area as that served by the British Broadcasting Corporation, its rise in official status has borne no relation whatever, in spite of the increased momentum given to it by six years of war, to its fulfilment of the mission which it was intended to fulfil, that of becoming the voice of the people, connecting the voice of each man to the other, so that the people could gradually form part of an ever larger community of spirit and live in and through it a more vivid life.

That the All India Radio has failed miserably most people, even the officials, will admit. But the reasons for its failure have seldom been courageously put down on paper. For I don't know of a single book written on the history of A.I.R. And, apart from Mr. Ahmad Shah Bukhari's catalogue of instructions to the programme assistants, there is no literature of criticism produced either by the department or outsiders such as may help to resolve the present difficulties and bring A.I.R. nearer the aims implicit in radio as a medium.

So 'where angels fear to tread', I wade in, without any intention to be merely devilish or destructive but as an amateur interested in the fullest exploitation of radio for our renewal and regeneration.

What then are the reasons for the failure of this giant cultural organ which is owned and controlled by the state?

I think it must be conceded that a great deal of the failure may be put down merely to the ownership and control of the Radio directly by the state. There is not here, as there is in England, even a board of directors, chosen from among the most distinguished public men and women of the country, which could check the high hand of the bureaucracy from choking the life breath of art. There was here, until recently, in charge of the radio, a bureaucracy owned and controlled by an alien imperial power, which was distinguished from other world regimes by being not in the slightest degree in contact with the people of the country. Since power has now been transferred from imperialism to our own people, the bureaucracy which has to wield it cannot be allowed to remain intact.

And there, in the opinion of many critics, lies the major difficulty. The All India Radio is far too rigid a state department,

working on a highly centralised system; it allows little freedom to its constituent branches to work out their organic relation with the populations among whom they are situated.

Everyone knows that India is a vast sub-continent with at least twelve major linguistic zones. And, although politically and culturally one, each part of the country has peculiar problems, interests and traditions which no central authority can deal with, except in the most perfunctory and symbolical manner. Therefore, it behoves the All India Radio to delegate its functions, as far as possible to its branches and try thus to integrate itself with the listeners in the real sense.

But what is the actual situation?

There is, as every one knows, a centralised news organisation, a directorate.

Apart from the fact that this makes for an unhealthy censorship there are other reasons for scrapping this department, the chief one being that the news to be useful must be local as well as of all India interest. As Delhi cannot have access to the local news of the various parts of India, obviously the news service would gain considerably if it was handled by the branches. In this way, it will also be possible for the news to be given out at times convenient to the listeners rather than at the caprice of the department, suiting its own convenience with regard to the availability of microphones etc.

Another aspect of the work of the Central News Organisation are the news broadcasts for overseas listener. While there is some justification for the continuance of these broadcasts to our immediate neighbours in the tribal territory, Afghanistan, Burma, Malaya, Ceylon and South Africa, there is no reason why Indian news should be wasted on the air in being sent to countries where there are only a few Indian nationals and where there is hardly any interest in our immediate local problems. For a long time to come the need is for intensive work inside the country to create the culture which we can export rather than merely to brag about it to the outside world.

Linked up with the conception of a centralised policy of the A.I.R. is its method of publicity for programmes. The chief organ of the department, *Indian Listener* is a fortnightly produced from

information supplied by the various Station Directors. Printed in an unsystematic Roman Urdu, it plays havoc with the names and items of the programmes sent in by the branches. Vernacular papers *Betar Jagat* in Bengal, *Vanoli* in South India, *Awaz* and *Sarang* in Northern India, supplement the work of the *Indian Listener*, but there are no magazines in many linguistic zones. The whole muddle arises, as has by now been demonstrated, because of the centralisation which makes A.I.R. merely another organ of the executive rather than the repository of wisdom in all the tongues of India.

There is a great deal to be done to alter the content of the various programmes.

Let us take first the treatment of classical music.

The conditions under which Indian artists perform are also too mechanical for the practitioners of forms which are peculiarly Indian and demand an easier atmosphere: for instance, the Indian musician thrives on support from the audience, and it would be a great advantage if the programme was recorded live from a musical festival or a private recital rather than in the cold studio. And it would be more gracious to depart from the European principle, which gives credit only to the composer and the conductor of an orchestra, by honouring the accompanists of the Master with a mention. Also, the puritanism that has been creeping into the department in the treatment of the custodians of our classical music must be deprecated, and A.I.R., which was the first great instrument with the film, to liberate the professional courtesan from the stigmas which a feudal society cast on her, ought to help to maintain her dignity as an honoured artist of our country.

Apart from these technical questions there is the basic question of the programmes meant for the peasantry.

It may seem fantastic but it was true that in areas like the Punjab, where the actual language of the people is Punjabi, A.I.R. gave out all broadcasts in high flown Urdu or English, devoting only half an hour or so a day to transmissions in the local language spoken by forty or so million people.

Such a policy strikes at the very root of the problem. If A.I.R. remains a centralised agency, seeking to impose its will on large populations in languages which are alien to them, it will never grow to be a useful service which could be expected to play its part in the building up of our country to something like an integral democracy. For the essence of this medium is that it should record people's voices, the natural voices, in the street and the village square, so that men can speak to other men, rather than broadcast ebullitions from the so-called educated classes, half doctors, who talk in feeble notes and in indifferent voices, patronisingly for the enlightenment and the delectation of the poor.

If there is lacking in the hierarchy at the top an awareness even of the basic and elementary forms with which to treat the problems of our country, one can hardly complain about its lack of subtlety and ingenuity in evolving new forms of auditory art.

The radio play, for instance, which in the hands of Corwin, and of Louis Macneice has revealed hitherto unknown potentialities of sound as a medium for entertainment, is written and broadcast in our country in the most primitive form like any low pressured stage play and read out by indifferent repertory companies as a kind of inflated dialogue.

In this regard it must be admitted that the blame does fall mainly on the scribes. The writers of our country have not understood that the radio is quite a different medium from the stage, that it lends itself to staccato speech far more readily than to long-winded rhetoric, that perhaps doggerel verse is better adapted to it than subtle poetry, and that the whole technique of the drama here has to be harnessed to the task of making an audience see through the ears rather than through the eyes.

Therefore, only certain themes can lend themselves to the radio play, such as are half familiar to the audience, like historical incidents or legends, for the distance between the transmitter and the audience can be bridged more easily by a familiar background rather than by an entirely new theme. Television may to some extent make the relationship between the actors and the audience more intimate, but still for a long time to come the radio feature will have to be content to intensify the sensibility of the audience

with regard to stories which are already known to it, that is to say, which are predominantly objective in content though subjective in feeling.

Not only is it necessary thus for the story to be popular but the words used can seldom depart from the spoken language, except for atmospheric effects in the narrator's comments; and often a cliche expresses the meaning better on the microphone than does an original image.

Other limits, imposed by the vastness of the radio audience, are that the construction of the radio play must be more compact. There can be no diffuseness here, as in the novel or the short story, and the tricks of the theatre must find equivalents in word and sound. Radio craftsmanship then can be acquired by the script writer better if he has sat in the control room for some time or listened for the whole day to a rehearsal of his play than by weaving word patterns in his study. Specially is this so, because of the part played in radio drama by music, the use of the chorus and the other 'effects', the gadgets as well as the canned laboratory sounds of birds, beasts and the elements.

All that I have said above shows that we have to think afresh about all the various departments of the radio from the news item to the creative techniques which this medium can make it possible for us to evolve, from the ways radio can be used to heighten the emotions to the manner in which it can be used to appeal to reason, in fact to review all the enormous possibilities of the microphone and to learn to handle this uncanny invention of the human brain to increase our pleasure. The seeds of knowledge and happiness began to be scattered over the whole of our land when the first voices spoke on the radio. I am afraid they have never sprouted. We have to sow another harvest.



Toilet Scene

THE BRIDE :*

The Status of Indian Woman.

To Krishna Hutheesing

Like everything else the female has been much exalted in India. Countless are the proverbs and aphorisms which define her beauty:

'Thy well-combed hair, thy splendid eyes, with their arches curved almost to thine ear, thy rows of teeth entirely pure and regular, thy breasts adorned with beautiful flowers.

'Thy body anointed with saffron and thy waist belt that puts the swans to shame.

'Moon-faced, elephant-hipped, serpent-necked, antelope-footed, swan-waisted, lotus-eyed.'

The myth which unfolds the story of creation about how woman came to be is more decorative still :

'Man was first created and woman next. And Brahma, the creator, fashioned the feminine form better than the masculine.

'As for the process of creation itself, Brahma had finished making man and came to the moulding of woman. He discovered to his consternation that he had exhausted all the solid materials. Whether that happened by accident or design is not known. But it is well that it was so. For what use would solid man have had for a solid woman ?

'Brahma, however, was very resourceful. He took the curve of the creepers outside his house, and gave woman her gracefulness of poise and carriage. Her breasts, he modelled on the round moon and he endowed them with the softness of the parrot's bosom. To her eyes he gave the glance of the deer. On her complexion he imprinted the lightness of the spring leaves. He gave her arms the tapering finish of the elephant's trunk. Into her general make-up went the indescribably tender clinging of the tendrils, the trembling of the grass, the slenderness of the reeds. Then he swathed her whole form with the sweetness of honey

*Extracted from *The Bride's Book of Beauty* written in collaboration with Krishna Hutheesing.

and the fragrance of choru flowers. Her lips he treated with the essence of ambrosial nectar.'

The actual life of woman in India has been less metaphorical and more sordid.

The old mud house in the village lies behind the guarded trees of a grove, shrinking from a too living sun, seemingly the same today as yesterday and thousands of years ago. Strange growths oppress its riven sills, and across its carved wooden doors a spider weaves its web. Beyond the tall porch of the hall, beyond the men's room, across the huge sunlit courtyard, shadowed by a verandah with pointed arches, supported by wooden pillars, stand the women's apartments, curtained off from the rest of the house by strips of coarse sack-cloth and hiding dusky forms who glide to and fro, swathed in rough homespuns. The floors sag under the fall of heavy unshod feet. The walls and ceilings lift, here the mute prayer of a lady spent and wrinkled, there the steady droning of the spinning wheel and the babble of many young voices.

Somewhere in the dark chambers is heard the wailing chant of a young bride. She is beautiful or she is plain, but she has made the best of those gifts that life has bestowed on her, through a simple toilet the rules of which have come down as habit from generation to generation. She does this *Sringara* because it is part of a ritual which almost every woman practises. As a girl she was not allowed to embellish her charms overmuch. And, consequently, there is a certain self-consciousness in her attempt to adorn herself, a self-consciousness encouraged by her desire to flourish and the fear of a mother-in-law only too insistent on the sense of duty and responsibility and dictating rules of conduct about everything, about beauty and love and marriage, about all the inflated ideals of womanhood in India.

Endless were the considerations which governed her marriage: religious, social, philosophical and astrological. All the ingenuity of priests exercised itself in discovering a man whose horoscope revealed potentialities which tallied with the scroll of her fate. Worldliness could not have exercised itself better than in her parents' choice of the bridegroom.

For months preparations for the marriage had been going on. At length the day had arrived when the sacred ceremony was to be performed. From early dawn, throughout the morning and the afternoon, the ritual of the bride's toilet had proceeded with slow and deliberate care, all the interminable details of the process of adornment, the ablutions in medicated waters; the anointment of the body with scented oils, cosmetics and unguents; the plaiting of the hair and the weaving of it in patterns; adorning it with ornaments of gold and flowers; the adorning of the parting of the hair with Sindhur, red oxide of mercury; the rubbing of various fards on the face and the use of powders compounded of various scented ingredients; the imprinting of marks on the forehead; the painting of moles on the chin; the application of collyrium to the eyes; the tinting of hands and feet with henna; and the last little touches of perfume.

After the performance of intricate ceremonies to the tune of holy chants, this doll had entered the home of her mother-in-law.

There life had unfolded some of its implications to her. She had sought the beauty and ecstasy of union and had realised its difficulties and despairs. And then gradually she had accepted the daily round, given forth sons, who were expected of her, till in her own turn she had become a mother-in-law.

Obviously woman in India has sometimes been exalted as a goddess but mostly pampered as a doll or kept down and oppressed.

During the earliest known period of Indian history, the Dravidian, woman is, for instance, like woman in the contemporaneous Aegean civilisation, worshipped as the Divine Mother, symbolising the entire universe. She is the nymph who comes up on the rocks to dry her long sea-green hair, she is the spirit of the trees in the forest, the sylph, the fairy, and she is the soul of the earth in its rich, ripe fertility, playing with satyrs and fauns and others of her kin, in the cool, starlit nights and heavy pensive days.

From the survival in some parts of India today of primitive societies it is possible to understand the position of woman at a time when there was no joint family but 'gens', consisting of those known to be of common descent on the mother's side. The prevalence of matrilinear descent under primitive communism points to the kinship of our culture of that time with

the culture of other early classless societies, when there was no private property and no slavery. Under the 'gens' a man was considered a close relation of his sister's son, but not of his own son, because in this kind of society the mother is known, though the identity of the father is in doubt. The various gentes constitute the tribe and if a gens becomes too large, it splits into various daughter gentes. The chief characteristic of the gens, deriving from the common ownership of everything is a primitive democracy: every member of the gens has the right to take part in the discussion of gentile matters and to vote.

We do not know for how many years, for a thousand or two thousand, or only for a hundred, woman thus reigned as the symbol of all that is free. But we do know that, even during times of which we can reckon the dates, she survived, the beloved of men, the adored. For the so called 'Aryans', who invaded India about five millenia before the birth of Christ, not only brought with them an idea (curious in nomads and yet quite natural to them, since wanderers long for mates and learn to respect them because they cannot get them), of 'the tenderness which a husband has for his wife', and 'the faith which a wife has in her husband'. And they accepted wholesale the entire sum of that magnificent culture which the Dravidians had perfected long before the Aryans entered India.

The later hymns of the Rig-Veda and the whole collection, of the three other Vedas, the Sama, the Yajur and the Atharva, tinged as they are with all kinds of influences which the Aryans encountered during their prolonged journeyings, reflect a very high place for woman. She is the goddess, the counterpart of God, the form through which energy finds expression. She is 'AUM', the mystic logos, the word or speech or sound, the spouse of the creator, in unison with whom, and through whom, the creator accomplishes his creation. She is Aditi, the symbol of the whole world of nature, the 'common mother of gods and men'.

Not only is she the embodiment of the poet's dream, the seer's fancy, but she is accorded a high place in the ordinary social life of the community. The marriage service, for instance, performed after *swayamvara*, the free choice by the bride of a bridegroom, defines the terms of a very honourable contract. Look at the final benediction pronounced by the priest on her and her

husband :—'Remain here, do not depart, but pass your lives together, happy in your home, playing with your children and grandchildren...O generous Indra, make her fortunate! May she have a beautiful family, may she give her husband ten children. May he himself be like an eleventh!'

The husband's greetings are more cordial still:

'I take thy right hand as a pledge for our happiness; I wish thee to become my wife and to grow old with me; the gods gave thee to me to rule over our house together. May the head of creation grant us a numerous race; may Aryaman prolong our life. Enter under happy auspices the conjugal home. May there be happiness in our home for both humans and animals...Come, O desired one, beautiful one with the tender heart, with the charming look, good towards thine husband, kind towards animals, destined to bring forth heroes.'

'Here may delight be thine through wealth and progeny. Give this house thy watchful care. May man and beast increase and prosper. Free from the evil eye, not lacking wedded love, bring good luck even to the tourtooted beasts, thou gentle of mind, bright of countenance, bearing heroes, honouring the gods, dispenser of joy. Live with thy husband and in old age mayest thou still rule thy household. Remain here now, never to depart; enjoy the full measure of thy years, playing with sons and grandsons. Be glad of heart within thy house.'

The greeting of the husband's family was affectionate and tender.

'Remain here, do not depart from it, but pass your lives together, happy in your home, playing with your children and grandchildren...O generous Indra, make her fortunate! May she have a beautiful family, may she give her husband ten children! May he himself be like an eleventh!'

It would seem that woman in this age was a responsible partner in the human marriage, in no sense subservient to, or dependent on, the will of man, specially as we learn that she can on her own initiative, or jointly with man, perform the sacred rites, read the holy books and write them.

But this Elysian state of affairs was not to last long. The twilight of the gods had come to India with the emergence of the priestcraft and the social and religious laws of their invention.

The rules of society are made for ordinary men by extraordinary men.

The priest has, in all ages and in all societies, either been the extraordinary man or has assumed the functions of one. He is usually the wise, old man of the community whose varied experience of life fits him to guard the minds of the young, to cure physical disease by giving charms and casting spells, and to heal the soul when it is suffering from divine discontent. Sometimes, however, he presumes to keep society in check and to control its search for the mystery of life without possessing the credentials of the medicine man.

But whether he be a real priest or not, his guardianship of mystery gives him a power over men which he guards as jealously as he guards his secret.

Now woman has, also, in all civilisations, been the custodian of a mystery, of a mystery as secret and as beautiful (if it is not, indeed, more beautiful, because it can be realised in the here and the now, in the flesh and the blood), as the mystery to which the priest holds the key. Naturally, the priest is intensely jealous of woman.

During the time of the elaboration of the caste system life was becoming less and less an adventure with the nereids and dim iridescent apparitions, capricious and wanton like all the subtle urges of the human heart, and more and more like a set scheme with a well defined goal in God. The old men of the community, the priests, were responsible for this fixed order. With a remarkable penetrative insight and subtle guile, they foresaw the danger of the disintegration of 'Aryan' youth in its dallying with Dravidian thought. They had already sought to organise the race into four castes throughout the years of their conflict with the indigenous peoples, arrogating to themselves, of course, the highest position, giving to the advance guard of the tribe the two places of warrior and merchant next in the hierarchy, and condemning the dark-skinned natives to the fourth and lowest class. The killing of a priest was, the Gods declared, the one unforgivable sin anyone could commit, and the punishment to be meted out to a person who reviled a Brahmin was 'to have his shoulder blades smitten off, to be flayed alive, his flesh cut in pieces, and be slain by a hundred pointed thunder bolt.'

Having thus consolidated their power they set about to curtail the power of woman who, whether as the subtle image of desire in life, or in her various disguises in art, seemed to lead men astray.

They secured the limitation of woman's power even as they invented the four-fold scheme of life: during the first stage of youth, man was to devote himself to his education, observing strictly the vows of celibacy and temperance; then he was to marry and live a disciplined life of the senses; later, he was to withdraw from the world, shun all desire, and seek oneness with the Infinite which the priests had appointed; and finally he might await death and the new life that was to begin beyond the funeral pyre.

Woman was thus alienated from man. For, the puritanical injunction which requires man to shun all desire, cuts at the very root of marriage, giving a degrading sense of inferiority to the relations between husband and wife, and exalting the value of a 'pure' spirituality leading to a fixed goal, a dead end.

Woman, the Mother, it is often said in justification of this era, still remains as the last vestige of an idealism that is almost lost to us.

But consider the degradation of the wife.

Manu, a priest and law-giver, is the villain of the piece, for he, as the spokesman of the Brahmins, has definitely and forever, forged shackles of slavery for the women of India.

A woman, he says, is to regard her husband 'as her god'. She is to realise her soul through him. 'If a wife obeys her husband, she will for this alone be exalted in heaven'. She is not to perform any sacred ceremony herself. Should she do so she will not be blessed with any heavenly rewards.

He hesitates a little to see if he cannot be a little benevolent about it all. The capitulations of his intellect are clouded for a while by the sensuous memories of the pleasures he has had in woman. He recalls her winsome little face, bathed in smiles, her inviting presence. And he says that she should, of course, 'be honoured with gifts of flowers and ornaments'. He becomes kinder still when he lends himself to contemplation, for, like all Hindus, has he not a mother-complex? 'A spiritual teacher,'

he says, 'exceeds a worldly teacher a hundred times, a father exceeds a spiritual teacher a hundred times, but a mother exceeds a spiritual teacher one thousand times a father's claim to honour on the part of a child as its educator'. And now he has melted and indulges in the most generous sentiments: 'Whcrever women are honoured, there the divinities are pleased, but when they are not honoured, there all religious worship is fruitless'.

But while offering all this vague and insincere adulation and flattery, he has deprived woman of all her influence, spiritual and material, by asserting that she must, on no account act for her own pleasure, but should always depend upon the bounty of her nearest male relative in all things. He has even snatched away from her the purse with which she was entrusted.

A man may marry freely a woman of his own caste, and he may take a second wife of a lower caste. But woman is to obtain the consent of her father or brother, except when she is marrying a warrior.

A man of thirty may marry a girl of twelve or a man of twenty-four a girl of eight.

A man can repudiate a wife for almost any reason, except that he should wait one year before repudiating her.

A man may marry again if his wife 'plagued him, wasted his money, was diseased, drank, opposed him or was sinful'.

A barren wife may be removed eight years after marriage; a woman who bears female children alone may be replaced eleven years after marriage; a mother whose children have all died, after ten years; but a widow cannot marry.

A man may correct a misguided wife by striking her with a cord or a bamboo cane, though our sage 'doubts the efficacy of such procedure' and prohibits a blow 'on any noble part'.

A more diabolical code of priest-made laws with regard to woman cannot be imagined. But the priests did not have it quite their own way for some considerable time. Freed from the contingencies of the wars of conquest, the later members of the tribe turned bards and minstrels and thought out a philosophico-poetic ethics of their own in the *Upanishads*, and enshrined their chivalry in two enormous epopees, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

The position of woman in the works of these warriors turned sages, is on a par with the best traditions of all nations of antiquity.

As Gargi, the wife of the philosopher Yajnavalkya, a woman is the author of some of the profoundest wisdom in the *Upani-shads*. As Savitri she is the symbol of true love who, choosing a mate even though she knows he is doomed to die prematurely, rescues him from the very clutches of the God of Death by her dogged devotion and loyalty. As Gandhari, Draupadi, Damyanti, she is the symbol of fidelity, living up to an ideal not imposed on her by men, but freely adopted. As Sita she is the wife who is implored by the sages to occupy the throne of her husband Rama on the eve of his enforced exile, for 'of all those that marry the wife is the soul', but who chooses to follow Rama to exile instead.

This whole literature is charged with the spirit of an ethic which has nothing to do with the arid logic of Manu's categorical imperatives: 'Consumed by the troubles of the soul', says the poet of the *Ramayana*, 'afflicted by reverses, men find pure delight in their wives, as creatures suffering from heat find it in the freshness of water'. It is a literature of chivalry *par excellence* full of chance phrases like this: 'Even in thy anger, O hero, beware of ill-treating a woman'.

But, not only is the insensate love without motives a little beyond mere human happiness, the priests are jealous that men find the reality of their lives on the breasts of women and not in their holy books. So we find that in the later portions of the vast mass of folk lore that composes the Epics the very excess of virtue practised by men overshoots the limits of humanism, and the Brahmins begin to belch forth their tainted breath again. Kausalya, the mother of Rama, wishes, for instance, to show the steadfastness of her love for her husband by burning herself on his funeral pyre. The Brahmins, ever ready to exploit an opportunity which gave them a chance to issue injunctions, define the faithful woman's words into a law: 'She who voluntarily burns herself with the deceased husband', they say, 'will reside in heaven for as many thousands of years as there are hairs on the human body.'

This is perhaps too obvious an example of priestly infamy. They were usually far too subtle and artful, and their guile is,

unfortunately, hidden forever in the pages of a too dry-as-dust history. But if we untie a knot or two of the thoughts that lie buried in their texts, we shall see how often they invented a law, hypocritically proclaiming it to be in the interests of society at large when all the time it was a convenient subterfuge to satisfy their own ends.

The poet of the Rig-Veda had sung of woman as 'the bearer of heroes', 'the mother of many sons'. The Brahmins made that the basis of another kind of declaration altogether, 'a son is another self, a spouse is a friend, but a daughter is a source of afflictions.' Add to this the priestly dictate that only a son can perform the funeral rites of a father if the soul of the deceased is to avoid the awkwardness of continual transmigration and quickly to soar to heaven, and you can see how the priesthood have legitimised a feeling which resulted later in centuries of female infanticide.

Since sons were wanted, according to the priests, and sons' sons to help their parents and grandparents to make a short cut to salvation, it is conceivable that it was deemed better to secure them as early as possible. This necessitated the practice of child marriage.

But when a young bride entered a joint family, (already prescribed by Manu to all men), and had to observe the law of obedience to every member of the new household, male or female, who happened to be older than her, she had hardly any chance of developing a sense of responsibility or independence. In fact, she was doomed to die in childbirth. That would give the priests another occasion to enjoy the rich gratuities and sumptuous feasts which they had enjoined every good Hindu to offer them at every marriage if they walked the path of true *dharma*, religion. So the custom of child-marriage was encouraged until it became deeply rooted in the race.

The idea of *Karma*, originated by the Dravidians, that man goes through the cycle of birth and rebirth according to the reward he has earned by the performance of good or bad deeds in the universe, is beautiful and majestic in its quaint naivete and ultimate profundity. The Brahmins made it terrible when, among the other implications which they drew from it, they interpreted it to confirm the low status they had already assigned to woman:

woman was weak, therefore she was inferior, therefore she must have done bad deeds in the past life to have been born a woman.

The tender humanism of the Buddha was a revolt against the priesthood, against the stodgy compilers of ponderous codes and heavy ceremonial texts. And for a while woman was liberated from the stifling atmosphere in which she had become imprisoned. But Buddhism is not a positive way of life. It is essentially a negative teaching, preparing man for death and the final release from the trammels of existence. The enlightened one's puritanical prescriptions for the living of a monastic life, free from desire, for both men and women, was no boon to the vast majority of people seeking, with all the weakness of the flesh, a little happiness in this world. He had, however, realised the spirit of life by the love, the pity, the tenderness he showed to every being on earth in view of the inevitability of death. His message was forgotten soon: but the world changed, nevertheless, after him.

For there followed now what is known in Indian history as the Classical Renaissance. It lasted about four hundred years, but what these four centuries saw of beauty has deservedly earned the period the appellation of a golden age.

It was an age which knew of the passionate and tremulous emotions that lie at the root of life. It was an age which had bathed in the sparkling dark river of life. And it lived in the awareness of this life, freely, with a freedom controlled only by itself, and by no alien sanction or authority.

This age has poured forth a wonderful stream of poetry in praise of woman. Could any woman be more beautiful than the gentle and innocent girls of Kalidasa's poems, perfumed with the rarest scents, garlanded with choice flowers, ornamented with necklaces that dally with their breasts, and jewels that gleam in their dark and amber hair, and waist bands of pearls that shine with the swaying of the wine jars of their thighs? Look at the gracious Sakuntala, for instance, whose only mission in life seems to be to let herself be adored; look at her definition of the ideal love: 'The wife,' she says, 'is an object of honour in the house; it is she who rears the children. The bride is the breath of life to her husband, and she is all devotion to her love. She is

the half of man, the best of his friends, the source of well-being, wealth and happiness, the root of the family and of its perpetuity ...Sweet-spoken wives are even partners in joy, ministering helpers in hours of sorrow or sickness... men who have wives accomplish well the sacred ceremonies and fulfil the duties of the head of the house...Such men are filled with joy and the happiness of salvation is assured to them. Wives are friends in the wilderness, giving consolation by their gentle discourse; they are like fathers in the serious duties of life, they become like mothers in times of distress...Whoever has a wife is sure of support; that is why wives offer the best refuge in life'. 'Marriage', she says, further, 'is a union in which a soul unites itself by love to another; a soul finds refuge in another; a soul gives itself to another.'

This age enshrined woman in endless beautiful stances in stone and marble at Sanchi and Amravati and revealed with splendid gaiety the knowledge of beauty and the human body in interminable scenes of abandon in the ecstasy of music and dance. This age showed the passionate flame of a woman's body revelling in desire in all the most brilliant harmonies of colour at Ajanta and Bagh.

To think of this age through its art is to visualise a world full of the loveliest creatures, with great eyes, filled with fiery passion, soft, deep, alluring and magnetic with something of humility, something of pride about them, clothed in marvellous clinging draperies of changing colours and glittering sequins, languorous, or sportive, reading, writing, painting, dancing, acting, every movement of their limbs vibrant with the appeal of love.

The festive procession of drums and flutes, of wedding songs and flowered chariots rolled round, however, for many a day, not unaccompanied by sorrow relieved at this time by a tender regard for frailty and old age, sickness and want.

About the eleventh century A.D., however, the classical view of woman was further perverted by the series of invasions from the North. It was somewhat the same kind of thing as happened in Europe to the Mediaeval view of woman, which was mainly a humanised paganism, through the Reformation.

The Indians shrank back into the shell of orthodoxy in the face of foreign conquest. All the complicated precautions, the jealousies, the throbings of the heart, which the invaders occasioned, led to the adoption of *purdah*, seclusion of woman, of infant marriage and polygamy.

It is a pity, however, that the Hindu women could not benefit from the Koran which made generous allowances to the wife, by giving her inalienable rights to hold property, to sell it or mortgage it, to seek divorce at her will, to remarry after divorce and to remarry after widowhood.

Unlike European woman, who began to react against the low status that came to be assigned to her after Luther, by the formulation of an ideal of woman as the equal of man, complete by herself, mistress of her own sex and free to use it as she likes, to accept or to refuse motherhood, Indian woman merely drifted along and became bound to man, more and more as a slave, less and less as an individual, apart.

Love in the form of the romantic impulse, so dominant a feature of the classical age, became taboo to her, except in rare cases; love—only as the relationship of the sexes to beget a child being recognised as valid—the duty to the unborn, to the inheritor of the traditions of the races, the tie of fatherhood and motherhood.

The Brahmins again succeeded in exterminating the primordial instinct for the development of erotic personality among men and women.

From this reduction of woman to the status of a slave, bound and fecund for the service of the hearth, the courtesan benefitted greatly, as in the Greece of the fourth century and in the Rome of the Empire. For, as the wife was merely the servant, the courtesan was the ideal of romance. Fortunately, however, the courtesan had been in India, since remote antiquity, not like the modern street woman, a fallen creature and an outcast, but the custodian of a tradition of music and dance and love, the accomplished actress, the inspirer of poets, sculptors and painters, the friend of kings to whom she gave good counsel in peace and armies of men, elephants and horses in war.

Confined to a narrow and cheerless round of domestic existence with priest-made laws and injunctions governing her,

the Indian wife would have been in a sad plight if there had not survived in life some vestige of the beautiful poetry of myth and fantasy through which the poets had expressed the content of their emotional strivings about her.

Outside the cities of the Ganges delta, in the villages and particularly in the fastnesses of the hills of Rajputana, where the warrior class was strongest, the exalted poetry of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* was still being sung and a new religio-romantic literature was growing up. Here, it seems, piety and devotion, with its insistence on chastity and purity, did not exclude free love of the sort for which the knights of European legend had fought. For a monarch like Prithvi Raj, who battled against the invaders had also fought for the hand of his mistress like the knights of the Ring or like a romantic troubador. The woman he fought for was also a knight, virtuously withdrawing, but not incapable of declaring her love, not so charming and sensuous as her classical predecessors, but gentle, upright and modest, true to her love. In the person of the beautiful Padmavati, the Queen of Chitore, who battled for her honour against Ala-ud-Din, the king of Delhi, and burnt herself alive rather than yield when the flower of Rajput chivalry had sacrificed itself for her, the woman of this age redeems what she has lost in status.

But in spite of the deeds of these Rajput women, priestly orthodoxy spread its tentacles throughout the length and breadth of Hindustan as the invasions lasted, and the system of making offerings to the Brahmins for the atonement of bad deeds and the appeasement of the Gods, remained firmly established.

A number of selfless men like Ramanuja, Nanak, Nam Dev, Tuka Ram, Kabir, who shared a feeling in common with men like Dante and St. Francis of Assisi, sought generally to remove the evils of Hinduism, and particularly to alleviate the lot of women. But they were obstructed by the twin forces of an alien government and stereotyped orthodoxy in their efforts for reform.

From now on the condition of the women of India became not unlike that of a person, lingering on a sick bed, who is not too unhappy about it. There is little to redeem her from the deadliness of existence, from feeding priests, making offerings and keeping fasts. Except that when she spends hours over her toilet, bathing in milk, painting her lips, polishing her nails, perfuming her

her hair, powdering her breasts, firmly believing it is for the father of her children, man concedes her liberty and respects the bearer of his children with the reverence he would pay to his own mother. If she is happy, she doesn't mind solitude and seclusion and considers her work as a religious duty. In fact, she would shut herself behind locked doors and give him the key. She is willing to satisfy all his claims upon her. And he appreciates it by submitting to all those ceremonies under cover of which she seeks to beautify the home life. And, at times, he is the most docile, the most willing, the most obedient, even the most hen-pecked, of husbands.

Occasionally the very spirit of a richer time inspires her to break the shackles of slavery that enchain her, and she emerges a saint like Mirabai, who revolted against convention and went her own way to find truth in life, or Chand Bibi, who fought against Akbar, the Great Mogul. And then men bow before her, even priests and emperors. They awaken to her potentialities and stir themselves out of their convenient torpor and apathy. 'It is a strange commentary on the magnanimity of men,' said Akbar, noticing that widows were being forced to immolate themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands, 'that they should seek their deliverance through the self-sacrifice of their wives'. And men listened to reason and willingly submitted themselves to the law that made forcible widow-burning illegal.

But perverse attitudes about the most vital things once established, have a way of persisting, specially as the sanctions of the church and the laws of the state are too often divorced from life. An individual like Akbar could say that the love of woman is the fairest of all things, but when it came to law, he could forbid his son, the poet prince Selim, to marry Nur-Jehan. The Emperor Shah-Jehan built a wonderful mausoleum to cover the remains of his dead wife; his son, the fanatical Aurangzeb, condemned his own daughter to death because her love for a general was not in the interests of the state. And the British officials of the modern Indian Government have, probably, all loved and honoured their wives (or at least, pretended to do so, though the suffragist movement in England excited the contempt of many an Anglo-Indian) but they have been altogether blind to the lot of women in India.

With the social and religious life of the peoples of India, the British professed to have no concern. The Christian missionaries, who alone interested themselves in the lives of the people, were handicapped by the fact that they belonged to a nation which had brought to India, not the cross of peace, but the sword of war. Besides, in regard to their work for women, their attitude was considerably influenced by the doctrines of original sin. Indian woman, with the unconscious nudity of her soft, brown body, was to them the very image of devilishness and carnality.

The bureaucracy, of course, knew it to be in its interests that the evils which gnawed at the roots of Indian life should flourish and weaken the people it exploited, rather than be eradicated and thus lead to a strengthening of the forces of discontent that already showed signs of conscious endeavour.

The immolation of widows had been legally abolished in 1852 after the heroic struggle of Raja Ram Mohan Roy to move the British Government to a realisation of the horror attaching to that rite. But child-marriage, *purdah*, the joint family and caste have remained in actual practice for want of legal support in the campaign to remove them.

The story of Indian effort to persuade the bureaucracy to declare child-marriage illegal is, in this connection, significant.

As early as the year 1866 when a Parsi reformer, Behramji Malabari, was agitating against early marriage, the state refused to interfere in terms which went to define the following pompous but lame excuse; 'In the competition between legislation on the one hand and caste and custom on the other...the legislature should not place itself in direct antagonism to social opinion.'

Since social opinion was the thing sought to be changed, a paradoxical policy was perpetuated, and urged as a prop against all agitators from Madhav Rao, who urged a reform in 1888, to Sir Hari Singh Gour in 1915, who proposed the raising of the marriageable age to fourteen for girls and sixteen for boys.

After a whole series of bills about child-marriage had been blocked by authority in wanton ignorance of the stifled cries of thousands of child-widows, an age of consent bill was passed after an arduous struggle against the Government fixing the marriageable age at thirteen.

Vital public opinion was still unsatisfied. 'Time and again this Government stands in the way of progress,' said Srinivas Iyengar, a prominent member of the legislative assembly. And this charge was substantiated by the official opposition put up to the *Hindu Child-marriage Restraint Bill* introduced in 1927 by Harbilas Sarda, which proposed to decree all marriage of girls under fourteen invalid. The Government chose to appoint an *Age of Consent Committee* to tour all over India and to inquire how the law passed in 1925, had worked. This inquiry protracted over two years, gave the orthodox interests time to rally against the bill and, on the Committee's report being presented in 1929, the bill was passed in a diluted form, making child-marriage under fourteen not invalid, but merely punishable by a fine of rupees one thousand or a maximum penalty of one month's imprisonment in default.

The law is a dreary thing, old and ossified and while it persists in its blind attitudes, life changes and shows itself in the newest and strangest of colours.

The sparks that were kindled by the reformers, I have mentioned above, have burgeoned in contemporary India, into a weirdly powerful flame. The last few years have witnessed the remarkable phenomenon of thousands of women, hitherto secluded, slothful and fashioned for ungirt ease, go forth into the world without a veil, individually, and in processions, demonstrating against the forces that have kept them down, braving ruthless oppression, undaunted, a spirit in their heaving breasts, in their flashing eyes and streaming black hair that derived from an invincible belief in struggle.

As we gaze on them with bated breath and a half-expressed sigh of admiration, we recall that it was thus the women guards of Chandragupta went forth from the embraces of their lovers to war, we are haunted by vague memories of the days when no chains bound their feet and they went about free as the air. And is it an echo-augury, we ask, when we hear them announce:

'We have awakened from a long rest, from too long a sleep to a realisation of our actual needs. Awakened womanhood is determined to undo the wrongs of the ages, in short to bring about the real renaissance and regeneration of India'?

This resolve was declared at a meeting of the All-India Women's Conference to discuss women's rights to education, suffrage and the organisation of social work. The spirit of emulation that lies behind it, is noticeable throughout the manifestoes issued at the Annual Sessions of this society which is linked by sub-committees all over the country; 'We women,' they say, 'have realised that all our difference of caste and creed and race should sink in an attempt to achieve a common purpose, in our efforts to better the conditions of our sisters.' And they have passed other resolutions which show their recognition of the practical issues involved. They unanimously demand, for instance, the development of maternity and child-welfare work, the securing of facilities for industrial training for women; they ask for inquiries (with a view to bettering the condition of women and children) into the working of labourers in mining areas; they seek to establish centres for the training of social workers; they urge the abolition of prostitution and the prevention and sale of illicit drugs, they draw attention to the insanitary conditions of cities; they urge the abolition of castes and community designations from the official census; they demand free primary education for girls and a host of other useful reforms.

But to bring about vital changes in the social life of the community, which women demand, a change of order is required. Hedged in, as India is, at every turn, by the intransigent spirit of a multitude of headless and heartless forces, it has also to contend with the febrile emotions aroused by the wholesale influx of the cheaper impulses of European art and culture. The impact of a new idea of romantic love, which is neither duty nor responsibility, nor even desire, but something inexplicable, unknown and undefined save in the pages of the bad European novels, has threatened to sweep the youth of India off its feet. Educated neither to know the truth about their own culture, nor to appreciate the deeper impulses of modernity, woman in India has almost lost her heart to the Hollywood actress rolling up her stockings.

The genius of India, however, dynamic, expanding and assimilative at the core, though it seems static on the surface, can be trusted to glide over the first flush of a merely flippant romanticism, and to ask itself the meaning of love and define an ideal suited to the new institutions it will accept. . . .

Actually, the truth has to be faced that, in spite of all the efforts made in recent years to break down the chains that enslave woman in India and the emergence of a few women to great heights of dignity and splendour, the majority of women still suffer from the most awful disabilities. The plight of the virgin whose innocence is outraged by the common demand of men for a dowry from the parents is familiar. The wife still has to obey respectfully the whims of a man, chosen for her by others and not selected by herself. And she is subjected to brutalities and humiliations, especially at the hands of the mother-in-law and the joint family, as well as the husband who forces child upon child on her without any regard to the delicacies of sex knowledge. The life of the widow is a series of protracted tortures, which makes her course of existence after the death of her spouse a worse hell than even that promised by our figurative religions. Of course, the emancipation of woman in Europe, too, began only fifty years ago, and the degradation of western woman is still extreme in many respects. ; But the truth about the status of woman in India will have to be faced if we are to realise the true meaning of our freedom, for the platitude must be repeated again and again that 'no peoples are really free who keep their women enslaved.' And we cannot go on practising the two nation theory which gives privileges to the male far in excess of his deserts and condemns the second half of the nation, the female, to disabilities of the most iniquitous and most heinous character.

It seems to me that if we bravely face the changes which are implicit in the social and cultural forces of our time, our impulses will undergo a change, too, and a new way of life will gradually arise, that will not be the less human for all the radical departures from our present mode of living to a new sense of values that it might entail. Perhaps man will discover more of himself than he has ever done in the past. He will discover the real human relationships, because he will have seen through the subterfuges of priest-made religion, discarded the illusion of convention, because he will have seen life face to face, shed hypocrisy, mastered himself and his environment.

The function of a woman as a child-bearer and the psychological states attendant upon it can hardly be affected by a change of social order, and sex will remain the very reality of all instincts.

But the insistence on the interests of the race, which has always been an important consideration in every social organisation, need not blind man into exploiting woman or being exploited by her. The incompatibilities between man and woman, for instance, which are smothered in India because of the practical difficulties that prevent bringing matters to a crisis, will have to be faced when both husband and wife are economically independent. The institution of marriage might become more honest. Certainly experimentation before marriage may come to be recognised as necessary for the achievement of polarity. And if marriage be considered a healthy relationship because, at its best, it conduces to a higher degree of self-respect, the economic independence of the individuals who marry and their awareness of the fact that they have come together in the interests of an ideal—the ideal of love, will assuredly give them a greater sense of companionship. And when both husband and wife know that if they make things difficult for each other, they can part without economic disaster, and that the marriage and divorce laws normally present no bar to separation, though they may take strong account of the interest of the children, they will neither condemn themselves to miserable lives of complaint and bitterness, nor be too willing to part for trivial disagreements.

It is possible also that the future will make for the recognition of the equality of woman with man. And the extension of opportunities for useful work to women is sure to prove that though woman is the equal of man she is also different from him; that she is other than man; that she is the bearer of children while he only plants the seed; that she has snow mounds of breasts to his strong chest; that she has round hips and tapering thighs where man has well-strung finely taut muscles; that she feels more through her sensibility and lives in the deep unquiet silences of her soul, while man senses the pleasure and pain of the moment but dreams of a stilled rapture; and that, precisely because of all their temperamental differences, they complete each other.

Woman has, of course, from times immemorial, in all countries of the world, played an important part in the economic life of the community. But after work there comes leisure, the time for cultivating awareness of value, beauty and poise. And unless the pleasure principle, which is the core of all life, becomes taboo

under some new kind of slavery there is no reason to doubt that woman will depart from femininity and cease to decorate herself with all those subtle arts and devices which embellish her person, give her a sense of dignity and which make her, eternally, the object of desire, partner of man in the procreation and maintenance of the race, the guardian of posterity.

“ON EDUCATION

To K. G. Saiyidain

Part I

‘Civilization’ brings its penalties just as the primitive life had its handicaps. The old societies were narrow and hidebound in convention and made for a simple, often monotonous state of existence. The new industrial civilization, which has now spread all over the world, has defects inherent in its very complexity.

The basic factor in all civilizations, simple as well as complex, has been man, the individual in his relationship to other men, the group, society. But this relationship is always changing. Once upon a time man had to adjust himself simply to a few other men, the family, the tribe among which he lived, and to the elements of nature, earth, water, air, from which he eked a living. Now, though he still has to adjust himself to nature from which he gets sustenance, man also has to adapt himself to all those highly skilled processes which he has evolved to produce an abundance of goods to increase his happiness and ease.

The vast change which occurred in the outer life of man when the steam engine put the plough into the shade has not, however, been accompanied by a corresponding inner change in the heart and mind of man.

Now, throughout the ages, the education of the young has been encouraged, so that the growing members of the human family may learn to adapt themselves to society, so that they may be able to inherit the world of their fore-fathers, develop it and live happily in it. Education, therefore, is a basic institution of society. And the aims and ideals of any particular society determine the aims and ideals of the educational system which it maintains, the structure of that system and the content of the education which it gives to its citizens.

At the turn of the century, even before the first world war, thinking men all over the world were beginning to see the possibilities of destruction implicit in the machine civilisation, if it was

allowed to outstrip man's capacity to control it. And they groped around for new ways of educating the young so that men could arise who could cope with the problems of the new age. But the holocaust of 1914-18 dashed all these hopes, because it revealed the bankruptcy of commercial civilisation and of the individuals who composed it. The long week-end between the two world wars and the intense fratricide which characterised the second carnage, showed that the cancer of self-interest, the philosophy of selfishness, of 'might is right', has spread very deep into the commercial, practical and political life of the civilised world. And, those among the survivors who are decent, look on helplessly at the spectacle of a world where the most primitive impulses of hate and fear have survived, side by side with the enormous scientific and mechanical progress we have made.

How can we combine the benefits of the complex civilisation, which the world has evolved, with human values? Must factories mean slums and idiocy? Should the radio and press spread only lies or half-lies? And should aeroplanes be used to bombard the innocent and guilty alike? Will the atom be used to destroy or to build? These are questions which all of us will have to face if we don't want more war, more crime, more sexual misery, more cruelty, more hypocritical respectability, more frustration and promiscuity—if we don't want the world to be the hell we have made of it!

I think it is unlikely that the tired, old and half-dead men of our civilisation will face these problems. In fact, it is a poor lookout for the world of which they are masters. But I have still some hope in those of my own age, the near forties because, having seen the debacles of two world wars, we may make the effort to correct some of our own mistakes or, at any rate, give our children the kind of education which will root out hatred and sadism from which spring hanging and war. This may to some extent lessen the avoidable pain and suffering of the world.

Now, what is the kind of education that might help the human race to survive and continue, with some degree of biological and human efficiency, against the unharnessed forces of nature and men's beastiality?

It is obvious that it is not classes and gym nor punishments and exams which will make our children avoid the mistakes we have been committing. Every educationist, who has given deep thought to the problems of the 20th century, knows that the ideal of education is freedom, freedom from fear, freedom from hatred and perversion, that is to say, the freedom which helps the mind to be free and to live amicably in any social group. If this is true, then it is clear that text books and grammar are not enough, but that education has to be construed in terms of the methods by which the creative urges, or the potential dynamics in every child are recognised and through which these creative, urges are allowed to express themselves.

There are those, of course, in our modern world who deny that every child has creative energy. They are mainly biased old men, who belong to the dying order. Then there are those who assert the psychological type of every child is predetermined at birth and that environment only moulds the innate potentialities of man. Perhaps the latter are nearer the truth.

For, undoubtedly, there are certain hereditary instincts in the human race. But the development of human society, even to its present inadequate standards of achievement shows that environment also plays an important part in the moulding of human character. If environmental influences be conceded, then whether the child is born with the urge to be good or to be bad, it is possible that the encouragement of adequate social habits contributes something at least to the maturing of human personality. And if this be so, education can be so contrived as to promote the better habits rather than the worse. At any rate, there is the creative energy, incipient in every child, the mere will to live, which must be negotiated into those channels which are helpful to the development of a human being and create human values, which are themselves the only test for judging whether a society is good or bad.

What is the education, then, that we do want for our children?

The answer is that we want the kind of education which releases their potential creative energies, which does not impose anything on them that they do not want, but which liberates them instead, which demands little from them but gives them much, which is not taking it out of the children to appease our own frustrations,

but which is giving without an ulterior motive to the extent to which it is humanly possible to give. Naturally, such an education is built on our real love of the children and not on false love which is hatred. And, inevitably, it encourages the social good in them rather than the evil. Concretely, such an education does not consist of adult moralising and the exercise of an authority which is mostly the rationalisation of our self-complacent belief in our own importance and from the point of view of which we think children good or bad as long as they fulfil our adult standards of respectable behaviour. No. Sermons, lectures, cautionary don'ts and corporal punishment only encourage unsocial tendencies in children and often make them into criminals. And the more we suppress the natural savage instincts in children the more we reap the harvest of their later expression of these instincts in violence and war. Suppression and repression and cane-driven sense are not education at all. Real education must start by asking, 'What is a child? What is its nature? what does it want to do? And how can it adjust itself to the home, the town, the country, the world and the universe and be an individual in the world community.

Obviously, a child is noisy by nature, averse to soap and water, prone to movement from the sheer exuberance of physical health and vitality. Has it then occurred to us that we must provide the child with a school which meets its natural demand? Have we thought of what kind of school the child wants rather than what kind of seminary it ought to have? We know, of course, that children like to play and we accordingly organise games. But have we ever realised that childhood is playhood and that children are happier when they can think of everything as a game, a sport. Instead, we emphasise umpires and referees and discipline and punish a child who turns truant from physical drill, and goes catching hoopoes or butterflies. We say 'children ought to be seen and not heard'. We teach the little ones manners, so that they can greet their aunts and uncles with joined hands and polite words. We seek to elevate the infant, not knowing in our confounded pride that no exalted talk can reach the depths of the child's psyche; that, however consciously it might obey and approximate to our rules of conduct, its unconscious nature is beyond all sermonising and that the unconscious is far more dynamic and powerful factor in the development of the child

than the outer hypocrisy. We belong to the obtuse older generations who do not see how easily we can exalt our perversities and shortcoming into categorical imperatives. And it is only comparatively recently that Mr. Bertrand Russell, Mr. A. S. Neil, the poet Tagore and the Soviet teachers have begun to question the premises on which the old schooling was built. Even now the vast bulk of parents and teachers have not recognised that if a child steals money, for instance, no amount of moralising is going to cure it, nor any amount of beating, but that it is likely to give up this unsocial habit if it is given a shining silver coin every time it steals and that in that way it will most likely be cured, for the gift of money touches what is in the child's unconscious, the desire for love that makes it steal, symbolically. Persuasion and explanation are likely to bring better acceptance of social rules and responsibilities than the current methods of obtaining good behaviour.

The criterion of all education has, therefore, to be the nature of the child. And we have to put the deeply hidden motive first and synthesise the inner life of a human being with his outer social life. The ideal of education is freedom. And the method to achieve it is love, and love, and more love, as well as service and devotion of the old to the task of bringing up and educating the young

PART II

1

I am afraid that all these elementary questions, which are important to any sane scheme of education, have not been posed with any degree of consistency in any part of the world.

In our own country, India, politically a large province of the British Empire for so long, and spiritually a suburb of London, we have been too handicapped to think about these problems at all. We are still a people who enjoy only the smallest percentage of literacy, and we have so far been excusably stupid about the whole matter of education. It is true that we began to talk round the situation about fifty years or so ago, in the wake of our freedom movement. But we haven't got anywhere near the deep roots of the problem, except in the writing and example of Rabindranath Tagore, who founded the model school and university at Bolpur, Shantiniketan, Bengal. And even now, with the

arrival of responsible government in our country, we seem to be tackling educational reform in a manner so light-hearted that there can be no realisation of the fact that an educational emergency exists.

Let us briefly trace the story of our mishaps in the educational field and let us see what has already been said and done about it.

2

I suppose every one has by now heard of Macaulay's notorious minute, which was to lay the foundation of that system of education that has prevailed in our country till now.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the tradition of Indian culture was still intact in literature, science and the creative arts. The earlier officials of the East India Company had often employed their leisure in the study of these fanciful arts and sciences and, less because they had better imaginations than their successors, and more because in the period of the foundation of British rule they deemed it necessary to know the people, they displayed a deep interest in Indian learning. Warren Hastings had been so fascinated by the methods of self-hypnotism outlined in the *Bhagavad Gita* that he employed various Pandits to explain Hindu religion and philosophy to him. Sir William Jones translated *Sakuntala* and the *Cloud Messenger*. Horace Hayman Wilson, Prinsep, Colebrook, Wilkins and Duncan had all sought information about the rich, wise people, with whom they had come to trade and had visions of a 'union of Hindu and European learning' in seminaries where the peoples of India would be given, through the medium of their own languages, a taste of English literature and science.

An infatuation like this, on the part of so many brilliant men, with the weird heiroglyphics of a people who joined their hands to other gods than Jesus Christ was bound to evoke resentment among the English community in India. The Christian missionaries went about saying that the crazy preoccupation of the Orientalists with the customs and conventions of the heathen was postponing the day when India could be won for Christ through the study of English life and literature. The directors of John Company declared: 'We suspect that there is little in Hindu and Muhammedan literature that is useful'. And they stressed

the need for effecting economies in the general administration of the Government by the creation of Indian clerks, for the day to day work of the Government.

About the year 1834 the rivalry between the Orientalists and the Anglicists had crystallised sharply enough for a passage of arms to take place in the Committee of Public Instruction, which had been appointed to discuss the best way of utilising £10,000 a year, set apart from the revenues of the country by Parliament, for the 'revival and promotion of literature and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences'.

Thomas Babington Macaulay, but lately arrived in India as a Member of the Governor-General's Council, became the chief spokesman of the Anglicists and, as a member of the Committee of Public Instruction, has left behind a summary of their views in the remarkable minute on Indian education which, written in that inimitable style of his, so loud and so vehement, could not but carry everyone with it as, during his younger days, it seems to have carried his father who, on reading one of his son's essays, said :

'Vociferated logic kills me quite;
A noisy man is always in the right.'

It was as a result of this minute, when it became law, that our current system of education arose.

The reader will recognise here the purple patch generally associated with the style of Lord Macaulay.

'I have no knowledge,' writes Macaulay, 'of either Sanskrit or Arabic. But I have never found one among them (the Orientalists) who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. I certainly never met with any Orientalists who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. And when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the European becomes absolutely immeasurable.'

Lord Acton has said that 'Macaulay knew nothing respectably before the seventeenth century, nothing of religion, philosophy,

science or art'. That may be an extreme view, but, on his own confession, he certainly couldn't have known very much of Eastern literatures. His partisanship in the controversy with the Orientalists presumably biased him against using the light thrown upon Hindu and Muhammadan literature by Wilkins, Jones, Prinsep and Wilson. Or, it may be, that he was a more orthodox Christian than has hitherto been recognised and was blinded by his religious zeal. For, does he not, after taking credit for the religious neutrality of his government, go on to say to his antagonists who had urged that Arabic and Sanskrit should be taught because they are the languages in which the sacred books of a hundred million people are written: 'the oriental language is barren of knowledge and full of monstrous superstition. Are we to teach false history, false astronomy, false medicine, because we found it in company with a false philosophy?'

But whether his major premise was wrong or the minor premise manifestly absurd, Macaulay had made up his mind about the conclusion: 'English,' he said, 'was better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of Classical antiquity. What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to be to the people of India'.

And inductive proof was not wanting in the application of this theory. He pointed to Russia as the instance of a country which, 'within a hundred and twenty years' had 'emerged from the ignorance and barbarism in which it was sunk to take its place among civilized communities...The languages of Western Europe civilized Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for the Hindoo what they have done for the Tartar'.

Several well-known Orientalists have criticised Macaulay for placing the English language on a par with the Classical Greek and Latin, Sanskrit and Arabic languages by pointing out that, with its flexible structures, syntax and diction, it is much more aptly comparable to the vernacular languages of Western Europe and to the Hindi and Hindustani languages of India. They had reason on their side.

But Lord William Bentinck, then Governor-General of India, agreed with Macaulay as a gallant champion of a higher type of civilisation. He considered English the fittest substitute for all

classical Oriental languages, in view of the facilities it would provide for easier commercial and industrial intercourse between East and West. Of course, he 'read very little' he said 'and that much with pain', but then he had Macaulay's evidence about Sanskrit and Arabic literature as being mere 'masses of waste paper'. So he promulgated an ordinance, decreeing 'that the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India and that all the funds appropriated for the purposes of education would be best employed on English education alone.'

Col. Lees, a distinguished Anglo-Indian educationist, has attacked Macaulay for misinterpreting the Parliamentary clause that originated the controversy which Bentinck finally sealed. He suggested that the word 'revival' used therein meant the revival of Oriental learning and that the word 'introduction' meant the introduction of Western literature and science. And he took Macaulay to task for his tactlessness. Lord Auckland tried to make good the loss of prestige sustained by Oriental learning by granting money for researches. And Sir Thomas Munro sought to apologise for Macaulay by asserting that 'if civilisation were to be made an article of commerce between the two countries, England would soon be heavily in debt.'

But Macaulay's minute and Bentinck's ordinance may be contemplated in the spirit of their time, in the light of the brave words of John Lawrence who said: 'We are here by our own moral superiority, by the force of circumstances, by the Will of Providence, and in doing the best for the people, we are bound by our own conscience and not theirs.'

So the scholars who were busy with Indian classical studies in the seminaries of our country, the artisans who were busy creating the subtle crafts for which the Indics had been famous, the alchemists and the practitioners of the indigenous systems of medicine, all had to shut up shop. And the heritage bequeathed to our forefathers in Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian and the mediaeval regional languages, became a closed book. The religious and philosophic systems which were our great accomplishments were rendered obsolete, and the poetry which was integral to our temperament was baulked by English rhythms. The greatest tragedy was that our whole main tradition was broken. And for a hundred and fifty years we were to remain neither Orientals nor Westerns,

ghosts wandering in a no man's land, reaching out now to the dim past and then to the foreign landscapes of Vilayats beyond the seas. And the vacuum was, of course, filled with a montage of English imagery combined with the rhythm of the Indian mind, a hotchpotch of which the hall mark was bad taste. From the poetry of Kalidasa we descended to the ribaldry of the limerick or badly written spun verse. And to add insult to injury, after having reduced us to an abject position, the English went about making fun of the Indian intelligentsia. The Babu, the learned man, began to be regarded as 'the traditional humorist of India'. 'The benefits of education', they said 'were manifold'! And they gave examples of the Indian's love of sonorous phrase by compiling anthologies of howlers committed by clerks in Government offices.

3

In 1844, the manufacture of Babus was proceeding well enough through this kind of education for Lord Hardinge to recommend that in every possible case a preference shall be given in the selection of candidates for public employment to those who have been educated in the institutions thus established and especially to those who have distinguished themselves therein by more than an ordinary degree of merit and attainment.

The difficulties of recruiting personnel in England to fill the subordinate posts in the Government of India were thus solved. And, as the economic urge of the middle sections in India found some degree of gratification through this, a mood of abject acceptance of the current education system possessed the well-to-do. So that the British Indian University became the Mecca of all youths and jobbery flourished and, with it, nepotism and the bureaucracy, the 'steel ring' of British rule in India. The cultivation of the mind and body, the development of character, culture, sensitiveness and awareness of life was forgotten in the mere attempt at literacy in the English language.

Soon, however, the supply of Babus from the British-Indian universities began to exceed the demand and generations of young graduates continued to swell the ranks of the unemployed in India, expropriated from the indigenous culture like the peasants from their lands, and equally deprived of any real knowledge of European ideals, inhabitants of a kind of no man's land, under fire from both the opposing sides.

'If education is the transmission of life from the living through the living to the living' wrote an independent critic about this debacle 'then we do not know how to describe the system of teaching that prevails here. It is carrying death from the dead through the dead to the dead.'

4

In 1882 the Government appointed a commission to inquire into the whole problem of Indian education. This commission pointed its finger at the obvious and glaring defects of the prevailing system and, with a profound pertinacity of instinct, sought to shift the emphasis of the education system from the Babu producing university to the elementary school. But, fundamentally, it was working within a scheme which precluded reform, and, apart from minor and paltry changes, nothing much was altered. The colleges multiplied and higher education was exalted as it had been before, and continued to produce a lower species of alumans.

A bill introduced into the Imperial Legislature by the well-known reformer Gokhale in 1910 for the introduction of free and compulsory education was thrown out by an overwhelming majority of the Government of India's nominated members.

The studied attempt of the Imperialist bureaucracy to keep our people in the dark owed itself to the ingrained belief of our British rulers that the more Indians became educated the more they would become discontented.

It was a policy not very different from the one which the British ruling class had adopted in the development of their own education system at home. For there, too, they had stood against enlightenment, side by side with the Church, 'to keep the poor from being a nuisance to the state,' until the pressure of the people during the late 19th and early 20th centuries compelled and wrung out concessions from reluctant authorities.

The ruling classes which were capable of doing this at home were not to be expected to be any more decent and generous abroad. The British Government, recruiting its cadres from the public schools of Britain, deliberately thwarted all attempts at reform by delaying tactics, by appointing commissions which sat for long years and by shelving their findings.

Almost every leader of political and social thought in our country struggled to bring a rational view of the implications of the degrading education forced on us before the public, but the autocracy was deaf to the pleas of enlightened opinion, because any large measure of education seemed to its custodians the thing that would surely and inevitably bring about the end of British rule.

As a result of the agitation and protest in the country against the organised suppression, the visit of George V to India in 1911 was utilised to indicate a new policy 'to spread over the land a network of schools and colleges, from which will go forth loyal and manly and useful citizens, able to hold their own in industries and agriculture and all vocations of life'. The annual allotment was increased and in 1913 the Government declared a new Indian Educational policy which recommended that 'there should be a large expansion of lower primary schools teaching the three R's with drawing, knowledge of the village map, nature study and physical exercise'. The authorities recognised the principle of free compulsory education, but, with a characteristic respect for 'reasons of decisive weight', did not put it into practice.

There was an increased emphasis on primary education in the years that followed and most of the provinces adopted education acts to expand it. But actually free primary education did not come to be really accepted.

5

In the wake of the great freedom movement that began through the first non-violent non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi in 1919, a greater self-consciousness was naturally engendered about the paucities of the Indian education system, as in regard to denial of political and economic rights to our people. With a radicalism which was for the first time to rally all advanced opinion round the single objective of ending British rule, Gandhiji proposed that students should turn their backs on the British Indian system of education and join national schools and colleges. A number of these parallel institutions were set up in various parts of India, from among which the Kashi Vidyapith at Benares, the Mahratti Vidyapith in Poona and the Jamia Millia have survived, organs of education which have produced some of the most enlightened men in our national life.

But Gandhiji's thinking on this matter did not stop with the national orientation that he was seeking to give to higher education. As and when he had time to enjoy a little rest from the major non-cooperation campaigns, he devoted his attention frequently to the problem of education as such, that is to say, to education in its earlier and basic forms. Not being an expert, however, he often sought the advice of the best educationists in the country.

In 1937 Mahatma Gandhi actually outlined a scheme for elementary education for the whole of India and got the Indian National Congress to appoint a committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Zakir Hussain to work out the details of a programme.

This Committee is the greatest single step forward taken in the discussion of the whole problem of basic education in our country. It set out a truly sincere and noble preamble to its recommendations, seeking to make Indian children 'responsive to the realistic elements of the present situation and to nourish them on life-giving creative ideals'. 'It desired to promote among them a keen sense of personal worth, dignity, efficiency and the will to strengthen in them the desire for self improvement and social service in a cooperative community.'

The basic education proposed under this scheme is intended for seven years between the ages of seven and fourteen. Figuratively speaking, at the stage at which it gives roots to the lives of young children, from two and a half to seven years, it is called Pre-Basic Education. Its main process, the time when the roots are sprouting, is called Basic Education. When it throws up branches into the lives of boys above fourteen years of age it becomes Post-Basic and adult Education.

But, throughout, this education is conceived in terms of learning by doing, through activity and work. And as such it ushers an absolutely new era in educational reform. In fact, opening out as it does a vision of the whole of our people, from infants to adults, learning to grow into strong healthy trees, the scheme becomes the harbinger of a new social order in which every person will play his part as a creative person.

If, however, in what follows I offer a criticism of some of the assumptions underlying this scheme, I do so with reverence for the framers of the scheme and in a constructive attempt to put

forward an idea of our present day needs which is more complex and urgent than it was possible to outline before the horrors of the second world war taught us certain lessons about human psychology which we had not learnt before.

While any just person must pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, who was the chief inspiration behind the Wardha Scheme, it is pertinent here to notice that that part of the scheme in which the influence of his technical ideas is most obvious are somewhat unsatisfactory, as they are not informed by any extensive knowledge of the minds of children. On the other hand, the proposals which are the result of Dr. Zakir Hussain's researches are actual, concrete, and give evidence of a deep awareness of creative education for the young.

Both the minds behind the scheme are, of course, unanimous that the best way of learning is by doing. But while Dr. Zakir Hussain's thought is influenced by considerations about the inner development of human personality for its own sake, there is a distinct emphasis in Mahatma Gandhi's conception on the material results which he expects from children who are learning by doing.

Gandhiji wants education to be self-supporting. 'For it to be self-supporting is the acid test,' he says, 'the crux'. If we ply the *charkha* and let the shuttle fly on our looms, he feels, we can produce yarn and cloth. And, as we need all the yarn and cloth we can produce we must get our schools to produce their quota and practise the principle of 'earn while you learn'. If we drive the plough and work with all the other instruments on a plot of land, we produce grain, fruit, vegetables and a variety of crops. And, as our need for these products is great, let every one, big and small, produce them. Besides, the *charkha*, the loom and the plough are not only machines but pieces of history, living and growing things. As our children work with these, they will learn to know these instruments as well as the history of which they are the products. History and science will in this way no longer be 'bookish' but living and glowing realities.

And, in order to ensure learning by doing, he wants to build up education on the pivot of a basic craft. He proposes the abolition of the distinction between primary, middle and high school

education. Instead, he recommends elementary education, extending over a period of seven years, or longer, and covering subjects up to the matriculation standard, except English—all centred round a craft. 'The state takes charge of the child at seven and returns it to the family as an earning unit,' the Mahatma writes. And he continues: 'You have to train the boy in one occupation or another. Round this special occupation you will train up his mind, his body, his handwriting, his artistic sense and so on. He will be master of the craft he learns'. The crafts recommended are spinning and weaving, carpentry, agriculture, fruit and vegetable gardening, leather work and other crafts, such as are in tune with the local and geographical conditions. The importance of the craft is stressed in the actual time-table to be followed in the school, for it claims 3 hours and 30 minutes out of a total of 5 hours and 30 minutes, the remaining time being apportioned in the following manner: 40 minutes for music, drawing and arithmetic; 40 minutes for the mother tongue; 30 minutes for social studies and general science; 10 minutes for recess.

The most important part of this scheme, according to Gandhiji, is that it is self-supporting. The goods produced in the schools are compulsorily bought by the State. And, of course, the prosperity of the school depends on how much it produces in the way of marketable goods. If the student thus tends to become a child-serf the Mahatma answers: 'God did not create us to eat, drink and be merry, but to earn our bread in the sweat of our brow'.

Now all one can say about this scheme is that it destroys the basic assumption of learning by doing by requiring material results from the doing, that is to say, profit motive enters schooling and vitiates the tender minds of children whose genius lies, in the light of all acute thinking, in the potential capacity for creative play they have, in the dynamic energy with which they are possessed. While Dr. Zakir Hussain, with his insight into the child's mind, would wish to exploit for educative purpose the resources 'implicit in craft work' Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis leads to its exploitation for commercial purposes.

The Mahatma is not unaware of the criticism levelled against him, that the scheme is sordid in so far as it unduly emphasises exchange value in the life of the child. But he avers: 'There is

nothing wrong about economic calculations. True economics never militates against the highest ethical standards. Just as all true ethics to be worth its name must at the same time be also good economics.'

But what exactly are the inner reasons for Gandhiji's drafting of such a scheme?

It is obvious that the Mahatma seeks to solve the problem of India's poverty by training every one of India's young citizens to contribute to the national wealth. And he has particularly in mind the village children, for he dreams of an India in which we will revert to the ancient, closed, self-sufficient village economy, independent of machine civilisation and devoid of class hatred and exploitation, a utopia built up on the reconciliation of the poor with the rich through the doctrine of trusteeship, an ideal state called Ram-Raj, non-violent in word and deed.

Now, those who live in the modern world and know how the operations of the laws of capitalist economics have made for imperialism, how the urge of countries which came in early on industrial civilisations has been to enslave vast parts of the world in order to flood them with cheap machine-made goods, and how the conquest and control of colonies and spheres of influence as exclusive markets makes for violence and war, know that the solution of our present difficulties is a socialist world and not the revival of a feudal state, however we might miss the old graces. The dream of perfecting good little village minds on the basis of khadi and non-violence, so that these morons vegetate within the limits of their self-sufficient communities is not only impossible in an India where every village is already inundated with cheap machine-made goods produced by foreign and indigenous capitalists, but is likely to bring about the very opposite of all those qualities which the Mahatma seeks to create in the average Indian. For the discipline of three and a half hours craft work and two hours lessons, with only a ten minutes recess, is not unlike the routine forced on the people of Japan with the result that those very 'gentle', and seemingly 'polite', 'well-mannered' Japanese citizens were capable, during the second world war, of inflicting tortures not even thought of by the Devil himself. The puritanical mind of the Mahatma lacks that awareness of the deeper creative urges of man which distinguished his contemporary, Tagore.

It does not occur to him that the discipline he inculcates suppresses every genuine and free impulse so that it is likely to bring its nemesis whenever the breaking point is reached. Gandhiji does not see that for all his twenty-five years campaigning for non-violence, not even his immediate followers believe in it or practice it. And he has no appreciation of the fact that it is the very authoritarian religions, Hinduism and Islam, which he exalts, and the doctrine of sexual control which he preaches, that gave to the atrocities, in the recent Hindu-Muslim riots, the diabolical and inhuman character that was manifested there. For 'the good', who build their 'goodness' on suppression and control and repression, are potentially evil and their hidden urges will out once the sanctions of conventional religion and morality have broken down.

Politically, this scheme is inept because it seeks to build up an India living in complete isolation from a militarised world, a kind of non-violent heaven in which 'our arithmetic, our science, our history will have a non-violent approach and the problems in those subjects will be coloured by non-violence'. And our people will, of course, be open to attack from any nation which does not believe in pacifism and covets its natural wealth or its markets.

Economically, the whole conception of a homespun India, rejecting the machine, is at this late stage in the history of industrial civilisation completely moribund. For the machine is already here, a machine which is a great improvement on the earlier tools of human society, the charkha, the loom and the plough, and the problem is not how to set about non-cooperating with it, but how best man can utilise it, without being misused by it. Under the conditions of the modern world it is also inconceivable how a country of four hundred millions can raise its standard of living without a soundly planned industrial cum agrarian economy. And, in this context, it is not clear how the Mahatma, obsessed by the ideal of the simple life imagines that every one else will reject the complex, rich and potentially plentiful civilisation which is already at our doors if we can only alter our social organisation in an egalitarian manner.

Culturally, this scheme tends to bring forth a type of mind hardly aware of the circles of life beyond his immediate ken, one in whom enforced habits will leave violences which are explo-

sive. The free mind which has come to be regarded as the ideal of education is negated by the stringent rules of the Wardha code, and the development of the human personality does not get any chance whatever. The mechanical idealism of the Mahatma succeeds in creating the very opposite of what it intends to do, amass a nation of 'dead souls' who will have bargained away their lives from the age of seven to anyone who is clever enough to exploit them to his own advantage, be he one of our millowners or some power-crazed politician at New Delhi.

6

A scheme, very similar to Mahatma Gandhi's, known as the Vidya Mandir but eschewing the idea of every school being self-supporting, was evolved by the Indian National Congress in the Central Provinces and inaugurated there by the then Congress Government on the 14th December 1937. In this, financial support was given through a grant of land sufficient in area to give the teacher a living wage according to the locality in which the school was situated, the living wage being ascertained at fifteen rupees per mensem. The income of the school could be augmented through charities and grants of grain which could be deposited in banks and administered by the elders. Also, the proceeds of the central industry, taught and practised in the school as well as the Government aid at critical junctures, were ensured. We do not know how successful this scheme has been in actual practice, but the lack of publicity about its functioning suggests negative results.

7

A fairly wholesome attitude to the problems of education so far was taken by the Wood-Abbot committee, set up by the Government of India in 1936 to report on the conditions and possibilities of improving Indian education, specially in regard to vocational training. Of course, the report went to the dead letter office which was the Secretariat at Delhi and remained ineffectual.

Messrs. S. H. Wood and A. Abbot, two liberal British educationists, declared with sound good sense: 'We regard the reform of the content of general education as being even more important than a reorganisation of the framework of educational reform.'

Mr. Wood, who wrote the section dealing with general education suggested that the children in the primary schools should be entrusted as far as possible to women who have the competence, the sympathy and the understanding necessary for the education of young children.

As far as the content of education is concerned Mr. Wood felt that it is idle to expect the younger generation to make a contribution to the good life of their country unless as individuals they are offered satisfying personal and social experiences in the school. 'Literacy', he said, going to extreme of emphasis, 'is not the primary aim of education in schools. Concentration on literacy is a mistake.' 'Cram books,' he continues, 'learning by heart, and chanting in unison, have their legitimate place in the disciplines of learning but they do not by themselves constitute an education for young children.'

Thus he suggests a curriculum which, besides formal education includes 'acting and singing, physical exercises, games and dancing; nature study in the care of flowers and, it may be, animal drawing and making things.' The creative elements in this education are emphasised when Mr. Wood makes a distinction between mere naturalistic copying in art and original invention: 'It is a waste of opportunity to ask children to make an elephant from a mould when there is material available for each child to fashion his own elephant.' And the implications of this attitude in terms of an active, as against a passive, school are drawn with a clarity and concreteness which are highly commendable: 'Our object,' Mr. Wood wrote 'has been not to decry instruction but to plead for the inclusion of activity as part of the educational process, in the conviction that for boys of this age 'doing' is the beginning of 'learning'... The work of children in classes III and IV should be adapted to the increasing capacities and interest of the children, but it should be based on the fact that children of eight, nine and ten years of age are growing rapidly in body, mind and spirit and that it is the function of the school at this stage to minister to their growth by enriching experiences as well as by book learning. Similarly, in the Middle and High Schools, Mr. Wood recommended a schooling replete with more complex and vital opportunities.

A very major defect of our education system has been the training and selecting of teachers. Mr. Wood laid his finger on this sore spot when he said: 'Decisions are too often taken and appointments and promotions too often made on grounds not concerned primarily with the welfare of the schools and of the children in them but to placate or promote political, communal or family interests.'

In order to overcome 'this major tragedy in India', Mr. Wood stressed the importance of proper teacher training. The training colleges should concern themselves with the social 'why' of education, as well as with the technical 'how' of teaching, itself. That is the only way in which the teacher will recognise his responsibilities as an educator and understand the significance of the school in the life of the community. And only in this way will he realise the dignity of his profession. Teacher training should be both technical and cultural and refresher courses should be given to enable the teacher to stimulate his curiosity and to sustain his morale.

Mr. Wood further suggested that the practice of promoting university professors to Inspectorship of Schools be discouraged and that cadres for this important service be called from among school teachers. And he suggested that the more responsible inspectors should have opportunities of studying educational practice and methods of inspection in other countries. It is desirable also that carefully selected teachers should pay visits abroad.

As for the medium of instruction Mr. Wood recommended the mother tongue, but gave English 'its extremely important place as a compulsory first language in the High School.'

Altogether the Wardha report and the Wood-Abbot inquiry gave a good lead to all educationists in this country to devise a new educational policy.

The spirit of inquiry into the problems of basic education which is about in our country is contagious. So that we find that even in so forsaken a province as the Punjab the Minister of Education wrote in 1937 :

"We in the Punjab are, however, convinced that any scheme of educational reconstruction if it is to be really beneficial to the people, must begin with the reorientation of the elementary system of education. This is the sheet anchor of an educational structure of the country, in fact, the seed time of education itself, but it has not been paid the attention it has deserved". And he offered concrete proposals: 'The courses of study for the primary standard will be ruralised, made self sufficient and overhauled with a definite objective which is the aim and basis of primary education. It will have an agricultural vocational bias and a bearing on the conditions of life of the students. Besides instruction in the 3 R's, lessons will be given in a practical manner in civics, co-operative principles, laws of health and sanitation, improved methods of agriculture and last but not least the multifarious programme of rural uplift. The system of education will be based on community work, more on actual observation of facts and things rather than on mere reading and cramming of a few text books. The ideal that we set before ourselves is that of a rural primary school which is the centre of village life and a powerful vehicle of social emancipation, economic improvement and agricultural development.'

The Punjab Government actually set up a committee in pursuance of this policy, to suggest and define broad principles in the planning of suitable syllabi and curricula for the primary and middle departments. This committee utilised the existing schemes, namely the Wardha, the Vidya Mandir and the Wood-Abbot reports and devised a syllabus with some awareness of the problems of an adequate educational system. But it has not been put into practice until now.

A rationalisation of the best elements of all these schemes, and related integrally to the Wardha and Wood-Abbot proposals for free primary education, was achieved by John Sargent, who was appointed by the Government of India to carry out a new policy at the centre. Subject to the financial stringencies, which have always characterised the nation-building department of the central Government, Mr. Sargent was seeking to put into effect the best elements of all the plans outlined above, specially the teach-

ing of the largest numbers of teachers in the shortest possible time. But progress in New Delhi is attuned to the speed of the splendid elephant!

10

The sub-committee on education set up by the National Planning Committee, outlining a national system of technical education and scientific research in India, has also recently published its report. 'The first problem in educational reconstruction,' it says, 'is the liquidation of illiteracy. The Wardha scheme of primary or basic education for the whole people is the best that has yet been framed and we have to accept it as the first stage in the whole system of education'.

But the Planning Committee's report wisely repudiates those elements in the Wardha scheme which owed themselves to the inexperience of Mahatma Gandhi. For instance, the suggestion that a child should learn a craft by the end of the school career to start a vocational life, is considered spiritually harmful to the child as vocation thus tends to become the principal object of education. The Planning Committee is equally forthright in its rejection of the exchange idea in the Wardha scheme according to which the current-expenditure of the school is expected to be met by the sale of the goods produced in the technical section. The Committee emphasises that these schools should be a direct burden on the State.

Primary education covering a period of seven years, says the report, should be free and compulsory for all children and such schools should be co-educational. The medium of instruction suggested is, of course, the mother tongue.

After the primary course of seven years, secondary schools for general arts and sciences of a three to four years course are proposed. And these should prepare students for admission to the university or higher technical or professional courses if they opt for higher education. Though the medium of instruction is throughout to be the mother tongue, the study of Western languages specially English, is to be encouraged at this stage.

According to the report, a regular sifting of students is to be made after completion of the primary school career. Only those

intellectually fitted will enter the secondary schools, and the rest might join what are called 'continuation schools' for training in arts and crafts and industries, such as drawing, design, general economics, civics, accounts and physical culture.

From the secondary schools, students may enter either the universities for arts and science courses or engineering and technology institutes or medical and other professions. After a university education there is provision for post-graduate and research work.

11

The actual situation which all these reports seek to ameliorate is still very grim. An agricultural country, India, still remains a very backward nation in the world from the point of view of literacy and education. As compared to a comparatively illiterate country such as pre-war Poland, we find that while the figure for literacy in Poland was 79%, India could only muster a bare 11%. There are 217 cities in India and 6,55,899 villages. Out of its total population of 38,89,97,955 a total of 33,93,01,902 people live in villages. That is to say, seven out of every eight people reside in villages. And it is in the rural areas that illiteracy abounds. For altogether, there are 1,90,000 primary and elementary schools in India, i.e. one school to every 3 villages. So that the majority of the peoples in India are denied the facilities of elementary education. The proportion of female literacy is negligible. And what education there is in the rural areas is controlled by District Boards which lack funds and initiative. The schools are lodged in buildings which are unhygienic and mostly unfit for human habitation. Naturally, under such unhealthy conditions, where the rags of the poor children are as tattered as the patched walls of the school rooms, education cannot bear fruit and no light can spring up from these unwholesome surroundings to bear the torch of knowledge in the abysmal darkness of our motherland.

Part III.

I.

All these discussions on education that have been going on in our country, all these committees that have been set up and the reports that have come out are evidence of our awareness of the



The Skipping Horse by a child of eleven.

fact that a problem exists. But, apart from the recognition of the fact that a problem exists and the most general treatment of it, there is very little besides Dr. Zakir Hussain's and Mr. Wood's essays to show that the approach to such an issue has to be from the point of view of the child itself, from its inner psychology and the development of its personality in the new world society.

On the other hand, outside India there is a widespread discussion of these problems today, specially from the international point of view, as a result of the shock administered by the two world wars and the threat of atomic destruction implicit in a possible third world war. Everywhere, intelligent rank and filers clamour for a reorientation of children's education, because they realise how poor were the facilities they themselves enjoyed at school and college and how grave are the results of bad teaching. Of course, public school minded conservatives think that this clamour is dangerous, since they consider the whole aim of education to be the production of cadres for the political, diplomatic and military services of the Capitalist-Imperialist State, while even the liberals feel nervous about the elevation of the common level, because they fear that democratic education will bring standardisation. It has not occurred to many of them that a democratic education, informed from within, does not either mean, levelling up or down, but that it is the only genuine source of all social freedom. But we are at the hour of decision and have to make a conscious choice. Are we going to help the evolutionary process or allow the growing generations to destroy each other for lack of a little human understanding?

If the ideal of education is, as I have pointed out above, freedom; if, moreover, the method of education is love and creative labour; if we want to build up human beings who are healthier in mind and body and who can courageously face the problems, the duties and the difficulties of life, then we have to ask ourselves: Does our present education, in spite of the many reports and the big talk, anywhere approximate to these ideals? Does it really educate? Does it make for free, buoyant spirits? Does it develop courage and optimism? Does it promote initiative and independence in the young, and a sense of mutual responsibility among

them as world citizens? Are they better men and women than the uneducated? Are they better neighbours, freer from religious prejudices and the weakness and vices generally associated with ignorance? Have they any larger visions?

I am afraid, looking around at our middle class, and those others who have been privileged to benefit from the existing education, one cannot honestly give an affirmative answer. Of all the bitter, frustrated, small-minded people in our country, surely our vast unemployed intelligentsia is the most bitter, the most frustrated and small minded. Inured to a philosophy of pessimism, surrender and abject servility to the elders, our young people have neither cultivated a high respect for their own rights nor much sense of responsibility towards others. The political slogans of the different communal organisations do service in their minds for independent thinking, and there is little attempt to search for a coherent life-concept or a philosophy of living. The merry old cavalcade of full-fledged graduates straggles out of the old and new academies every year, hungry for jobs which do not exist, thirsty for patronage which is so niggardly, a procession of suicidal wrecks, drifting with every wind that blows, following any one of the superficial, unrelated ideas with which they have been stuffed, montage men with half a heart and no head, or half a head and no heart, their senses, their bodies enfeebled, their manhood baulked at every step.

So long as the educational system is unable to develop in its wards a capacity for absorbing useful information, to stimulate the critical faculty and above all to train the emotions, we shall go on seeing this sad spectacle of humanity, uprooted from its natural soil and soaked in a welter of superficiality, whether this superficiality is taught in English, Hindustani, Bengali, Gujerati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese, Pushtu or Oriya. Nor will large doses of chauvinism improve it. In fact, at this period of world history, when the nation state is already entering on a period when it may have to yield sovereignty voluntarily, because if it retains a capitalist structure, it cannot help becoming an imperialist, bourgeois, reactionary nation state, the result of an undiluted chauvinism in education will be to create generations of malicious, hate-mongering, uncouth beasts who will become a menace to any comparatively sane world development.

To take the point about education and art, or as Prof. Herbert Read puts it, education through art, we have to note that though drawing and modelling and decorative work are already taught in schools, they are at the moment only asides from the main education and produce less than the dexterity of the craftsman they are intended to produce. The thing is to cultivate a belief in the primacy of art and to see to it that the teaching of arts and crafts is seriously accepted and introduced into the curricula of the schools.

I fancy someone will say at this stage: 'how can this arty-crafty education help to make our children into men?' The point is that the teaching of art trains the senses, the nerves, and their end organs, the eye, the ear, the nose, the skin and the palate, so that these can minister to the thought processes. The intensification of the sensibility, so that it can give form to the heterogeneous phenomena of life removes the defects in the sense organs. For as is well-known, the capacities of different people for observing the phenomena of life are very unequal and are often weighed down by the inertia of the receiving instruments. Attention, which is the primary instrument of knowledge, wanders.

Now the practice of art by its very nature affords opportunities of sense-improvement, because the child gets accustomed through it to 'notice' sights and sounds and smells, to distinguish them and to learn their qualities and accumulates in the memory a wealth of information for use in later life.

Further, art helps, through the need to exteriorise forms, to make the child attentive and thus to achieve concentration, the faculty not only of looking at one thing deeply, but of observing several different strands of phenomena and relating them coherently through the imagination.

As drawing is the activity which weds the hand to the senses and which, through attention and concentration, ensures accuracy of observation, it is also the most important instrument in the training of the senses and by disciplining the lazy, wayward and chaotic impulses purifies the nervous system. Inevitably, the rhythmic flow of the senses, the disciplined control of the organs releases the repressed desires and longings and removes the emotional obstacles in the way of balanced living. Thus the realisation

of technical virtuosity, which is the core of the artistic urge is, surprisingly enough, also conducive to the triumph of love over hatred.

So that the primary task of our educationists today is first to re-educate themselves and then to reorientate the whole education system—and devise a centrifugal plan in which what a child is and what it must become in society are integrally connected.

2

One does not expect the fossilised minds, bred in a feudal cum servile colonial structure of society, to re-educate themselves. The only hope is that the younger generation of our intellectuals, who are the products of a freedom movement, which is now being increasingly divested of those oldies who hypocritically shared the concept of freedom with us for their own selfish, vested interests, will take the lead in urging that the ideal of all education is freedom—and a well integrated social human being, the free mind. And they will have to declare categorically that those of us who love freedom are not afraid of license.

Once we firmly believe that the motive force of education is freedom, the concrete task of refashioning our existing system will not be impossible. For, so far as the preparation of an adequate shell for a centrifugal education system goes, the various reports, which have come out in our country have already built it. The organic connection which the Planning Committee sees between the primary, secondary and high school education, with its emphasis on science and technology, shows that the scheme is already there.

3

But there remains, apart from the insistence on freedom as a motive force in education, the need for emphasis on certain considerations about child nature which, though simple enough, are not always noticed in all their implications.

Now, anyone who has visited a school anywhere in our country, with the possible exception of the activity schools at Shantiniketan or Preet-Nagar, knows that throughout the country our children are made to fit the school and not the school made to fit the children. Certain preconceived notions of what a child

ought to be were dictated by some elder statesmen arrogating to themselves omniscience and we see the spectacle everywhere of children sitting for long periods at a time in the school room, waving their heads up and down and learning some text by rote while the school master raises his voice or his cane every now and then to see that they do not flag in the repetition of the formulas. The result of several years' schooling of this kind is that even the healthy village child grows up to be a weakling, possessed of a certain amount of useless book knowledge and without any of the sound commonsense of his illiterate forefathers. The standard of success of these children is money and they end up in wage slavery. Immune from much contact with the sun, the earth, the wind and the rain and made to despise the use of his hands, the child can neither develop into a full human being nor mature into the good agriculturist or artisan he has to be.

Obviously, then, we have to repudiate the self-complacent adult's conception of what a child should be or should not be, on which the old schooling has been based, and we have to realise that we are living in an age when social psychology is already a highly developed science. All our contemporary knowledge and insight must help us to understand that a child wants to be itself, and to work out its nature and that it will learn to adapt itself to life more easily if it is allowed self-expression than if it is gagged by 'discipline', 'sound direction', 'moral teaching' and 'religious instruction'. The new attitude requires a belief in the child as essentially good and not the evil being it is supposed to be, a faith in the dynamic, creative energy of every born human being, a final faith exercised through love and tenderness and utmost patience even for the erring, seemingly wicked, or the difficult, the 'problem' child.

But most of the so-called wise parents and teachers of the world will say: 'Life is hard. Surely we must bring up our children, to fit into life. How will children brought up in a 'free' school compete with others if there is no discipline? How will they get to be sane human beings in the sober, workaday world?'

Of course, these wiseacres beg the question. If the sober workaday world, which they have made for us, whose primary characteristic is a major war every twenty-five years, and whose daily routine are murders, tortures, hangings, neuroses and a

series of economic and political crises, then it is better that the children of the new school should not fit into life, but should revolt against its stupidity and disruption in order to create a saner life.

4

But what exactly are the essentials of the child nature on which the new system of education must be founded?

In the opinion of all truly civilised educationists, apart from the basic love elements in a child, there is the dual drive towards 'doing and possessing'. The first of these is most pronouncedly incipient in early childhood and merges into the second in our debased society, where the notion of private property and the exploitation of other people's labour for profit has become the norm. The rationalisation of all the primordial instincts towards common good will only be achieved in a socialist world. Meanwhile, any system of education which negotiates the child's love for 'doing' into liberating channels will be likely to achieve the goal of education, freedom.

Now, in recognition of the child's love of 'doing' things has been evolved the principle: 'Learning by doing'. And the best way to do things, the activity which seems to come naturally to children has been found to be drawing or modelling or craft work. Therefore, the most intelligent educationists in the world such as Froebel, Montessori and Neil have been suggesting the putting of art on the map in the smallest class rooms and in the humblest schools.

This does not mean that it is intended to make artists of all children. The shifting of emphasis from 'learning by rote to 'learning by doing' owes itself to the growing awareness that every child is gifted with the sense of rhythm which bursts out in song, dance, play, in the handling of colour, in scribbling and, in fact, in every form of imaginative creation. The process of recognition and differentiation of forms and the urge to express our vision of a particular form through signs and symbols, is almost instinctive in childhood. The poetical or graphic description of what we see and feel, develops naturally out of first reactions and is akin to the primitive man's embellishment of his tools and his dwelling-place, an urge to control phenomena, to master

nature. As all these activities afford the child opportunities for self-expression, and a great many of its negative propensities and obstacles are sublimated through this kind of aesthetic indulgence, the practice of arts and crafts in a school can act as a liberating force and as an aid to the sensibility. The result will be a more balanced outlook in every citizen and a higher level of good taste in the community, while those who have great inventive talents will be singled out for the special service of society. Also, this new basis for education will help to enlarge the narrow purview of classical and scientific studies and make for a deeper outlook in the field of general education, thus avoiding the excesses of intellectualism on the one hand and emotionalism on the other and leading to the development of fully grown individuals, free spirits, devoid of the fanatical hatreds, fears and perversions that have made our world of love into a jungle.

In the particular case of India, where we are beginning a new chapter of political history, we are in the position to give a lead to the whole world because our ancient tradition has equipped us to look at life more deeply. All our philosophical systems inculcated the development of the inherent powers in man as the ideal of education rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. And the beautiful creations of the folk imagination in our country, the wonderful dances, the intricate designs, the lovely craft work with its gay sense of colour and profound harmony, show that even in vocational work our forefathers displayed sensitiveness, accuracy, thought, adaptability and the sheer sense of joy in creation.

5

If the deep connection between art and education be admitted then we have to ask: in what way can we promote the actual integration of these in our education system?

First of all, it is obvious that there must be a complete change in our mental outlook and we must devise a system which will enable our children to proceed from the training of the senses to the development of the mind and heart and of an adequate social sense. This reorientation of our own attitude from the patronising, supercilious, all-knowing elders we generally are to the friendly, helpful and comradely one, is the first necessity.

For, as Mr. A. S. Neil wisely insists, 'there are few difficult or problem children, there are only problem parents and problem teachers'.

Once this change of heart has been achieved there are certain other psychological considerations which must inform the curriculum of the school in order to reform the present system.

The stimulation of the senses in its own turn helps the training of the mental and moral faculties. For the faculty of observation brings together the raw material in which we discover relatedness. All the five senses of the scientist, for instance, and his improved sixth sense of microscopes and other instruments, offers information of a minute character which is later worked up into deductive formulae. But the children, encouraged early to know the objects through drawing or craft work or creative example, not as a task but out of curiosity and interest, will master these objects more easily than in any other way. If they are asked to handle a flower, for instance, so that they get to know its exact shade, its glow, the shape of its petals, and what happens to it if it is crushed, they will know the flower so completely that its peculiarities will be indelibly impressed on their memories. Our elders must realise that a child which is trampling on a bed of pansies, or crushing a rose is not necessarily destroying these but exercising its creative gifts, that is to say, it is unconsciously learning what these flowers are like when subjected to a certain treatment, whether they hit back or bite or remain passive.

Similarly, experience of forms in early childhood helps the memory and imagination as, the process of remembering is not the conscious and mechanical repetition of text book lessons, but the unconscious observation of differences through comparison and contrast. Thus, if the likeness and differences of things are revealed to the children through nature-study, collection of beautiful stones, shells and the counting of stars, the laws of genus and species could be taught them more easily and the scientific attitude developed as a permanent part of the equipment of the child's mind. The gift of metaphor that arises from the fusion of subtle judgment, argument by analogy and imagination, are all built up through the early acquisition of vivid sense data. In fact, there can be no poetry or imaginative creation without

adequate training of the child's capacity of forming mental images of things seen or felt, without stimulation of the faculty for association of ideas, and without the coming to be of a delicate sense of the nuances and under currents of experience. And, equally, conceptual thought, or reasoning cannot be developed except through an emphasis on accurate observation of facts, on having all the the facts of a case and on eliminating the margin of error. The usual way of training the logical faculty in our seminaries is through text books of logic, but this is a stupid and formalistic method because it substitutes book knowledge for the knowledge of life itself, where reasoning is necessary, natural and unconscious. A more coherent way of approaching abstruse knowledge is to teach the child to notice examples of the working of universal laws outside the classroom, to encourage him to make inferences from facts and from the current experience of the relations of identity, cause and effect etc.

6

Of course, all this psychological insight into the methods of teaching children will be of little avail if the main psychological fact goes on being ignored in practice, however it might be appreciated in theory, that no real education can be given except in the mother tongue of the child. Language, it must be understood, is kinetic; it is, like bodily movement or gesture, an intimate part of the physiology and mental make-up of the child. A deliberate neglect of this fact resulting in the undue emphasis on English in our education not only violated against the first principles of education but brought about its inevitable nemesis—the ruin of generations of our young men and women and the denationalisation of the whole of our middle class. Now, every one will welcome attempts to eliminate it from the primary, elementary and secondary school teaching. But there must be a balanced view about the advantages of retaining it in the higher school and college education as an optional subject. And there must be some attempt made at an improvement in the teaching of English and in raising the standards attained at the Matriculation level because as a language of international exchange it is probably one of the few assets in the balance sheet of our prolonged slavery.

7

I fancy that if a model primary school could suddenly come to be by some miracle it would be a clean, wholesome place in

the loveliest surroundings, where a child would go to play rather than to learn, and where it would learn more because learning is more interesting through play than through academic lessons. Such a school would have a cinema hall to show films specially prepared by experts on visual education, it would have radio sets in every class room, because training by the ear brings appreciation of facts as well as suggestion more deeply to children; and it would have a theatre where children would perform plays written by themselves. Such a school would have been beautifully planned and built as a new kind of cultural centre, with a miniature museum and botanical garden attached to it as well as a library and a sports ground, replete with all the fixtures of a gymnasium. Such a school would be run by a democratically elected committee in which the students and teachers and parents would be equally well represented. And the whole spirit of the school would be egalitarian, without the teacher arrogating to himself any airs of superiority like Oliver Goldsmith's proverbial schoolmaster. In fact, the teacher in such a school would be the most hard worked, having to do what the children want and not always making the children do what he wants. Cleanliness, order and discipline would not be enforced by the headmaster but through bye-laws made by the school parliament, and anti-social acts by any member of the school would be judged by a democratically elected jury on a fixed day every week—punishment being awarded not with a view to oppress and torture but to reform the psychology of the erring individual. Classes would be held according to a time-table which gives the bulk of the school hours to play, or to teaching in which the play function has an important place, and attendance of the academic lessons would not be demanded as much as willingly given by the children, no reproofs being administered to any of them if they choose to absent themselves from a lesson and prefer to play football, cricket or kabadi. For children always make up the deficiencies in their intellectual equipment when they feel the curiosity to master a subject, far more quickly than if they are forced to learn something at a time when they are interested in other things. Such a school would, of course, be coeducational, and boys and girls would begin to grow up as humanly equal, aware of the naturalness of the differences of sex and without the invidious distinction of male superiority and female inferiority that at present corrodes

the basis of our national life and through which one-half of the nation, the female, is condemned to have no voice in the running of the country. In this way, the perversions that arise from the denial of sex would be sublimated in a healthy awareness of sex; and the roots of life, which are poisoned by the ignorance and stupidity of a puritanical society, would burgeon as naturally as vegetables and animals and flowers. Such a school would be like a large noisy family, growing up around a wise headmaster or headmistress, uninhibited, free, intelligent non-aggressive and co-operative, a community in which every member has natural rights as well as responsibilities and in which no one bullies anyone else, in which not even the *pater* or *mater* *familias* has the right to say an untoward word to the least member of the household merely because of the supposed advantage of seniority in years or wisdom. Such a school would lay the foundations of a wholesome social personality in every child and it would go towards making the individual a new kind of individual for a new kind of world.

8

The psychological considerations I have put forward thus all point to the need for revolutionising our education system, specially the primary school education, for it is there that the basis for the whole subsequent life of the child is laid.

But the ideology of this revolution must not be snippets of borrowed ideas. The whole scheme should be worked out as an elastic mechanism for achieving the maximum degree of freedom, for the human personality in a humanist world in which the highest human and social values prevail, without any ulterior sanctions derived from the whims of religious cranks or fanatical individuals.

Let me put down what is a minimum basis for such education in our country:

First of all, we must really and genuinely recognise the rights of all our peoples to free primary education. This basic principle is the hinge on which our cultural development rests. And we cannot hope to discover a new way of life unless, from the kindergarten to the secondary school and university stage, literacy and cultural awareness opens up our people to the rudiments of modern knowledge.

Secondly, as we have inherited a large legacy of ignorance from the past and have one of the largest populations of illiterate adults in the world, we must create special schools for teaching them quickly, preferably through radio and visual education methods. And we should not rest content until we have absolutely wiped out illiteracy in our vast country.

Thirdly, it should be recognised that the ultimate financial responsibility for all education in our country must rest on the State.

Fourthly, as the state remains neutral in matters of religion, so it must not sanction any religious education in State, or State-aided schools.

Fifthly, all education must be in the mother tongue of the children in the various linguistic zones of India.

And, in general, we must keep in view that what we are aiming at is a cultural revolution through which the variegated inheritance of our ancient land and those of other countries may be recaptured and developed into a beautiful unity in diversity, such as may afford a rich example to the other multi-national states of the world. We must see to it that every one of our citizens has the opportunity to go to the roots of experience and becomes a world citizen. Even the sick and mentally defective children, the deaf, the dumb and the blind have a claim to be taught. So that while intensifying the local and regional characteristics of our culture patterns, we must emphasise the primary value of man and love for man as such. And we must infuse into our peoples, the sense of the dignity of creative labour and the qualities which go with it, as, for instance, love, which makes one give something to oneself but also a great deal by way of devotion to others; respect for truth which is the approximation of all truths; and poetry and courage.

I am afraid I do not think that it will be easy to bring about this in less than half a generation. For though a few individuals of sensibility may found their own schools and admit to them the children of well-to-do parents, these schools will only remain examples of what can be done in this regard and will not be able to fulfil the ideals of a democratic, humanist, free primary education for everyone. Our vast public, being illiterate, will not

know how to choose between the imbecility which is taught in the schools and real education. And, as the leaders of thought in our country themselves derive from a system of education, which has been at one pole an imitation of the British and at another pole a complete reaction against the Western and a harking back to the ideal of a supposed golden age of the Vedic period, so what is needed is a programme planned by a radical Government which goes down to the root of the problem with a generous purse and great honesty of purpose.

I think in some ways the question of the teachers who are to help to change our education system is the pivot of our present problem. And if we can devise some means of tackling this we may be able to introduce new bearings in our education system and thereby initiate the process of change which will ultimately alter the mental and moral outlook of our people.

The Sargent Report which, as I have said, was a rationalisation of previous schemes, was alive to this practical issue when it said: 'Progress cannot outstrip the supply of teachers'. But it took a fair too tardy view of our needs, because, in view of the various difficulties, financial as well as academic, it estimated that the goal can be reached in forty years. Perched in New Delhi Offices and riding on the hard shell of the bureaucratic tortoise, it was impossible for anyone under the old regime to take a different view of the possibilities of bringing about the transformation we desire. As Mr. Kodanda Rao, of the Servants of India Society, has recently pointed out, in forty years India would, according to the speed of application of the Sargent scheme, have reached the stage of educational development of most of the other nations before the war. As these nations are, in view of their own paucities, struggling to evolve quicker, much higher and subtler methods of education, we would still remain behind. But are we congenital idiots that we cannot at this new stage of development make a short cut to the very best schooling and come abreast of other world citizens? Or are we so burdened with a sense of inferiority that we are afraid of raising our standards? Do we not realise that while the other nations have been experimenting we have been

kept back, and that we must regard the building up of the new healthy, vital and humane generations of the future as an emergency problem if we want to avoid succumbing to the violent chaos of European life and to the petty fanaticisms and racial hatreds which have already spread among us in the wake of unassimilated ideas of Democracy?

Mr. Kodanda Rao suggests increasing the number of competent potential teachers by making professional education part of the matriculation, the intermediate and the B. A. courses, and making it compulsory in the matriculation and optional in the others.

In my opinion this is a very useful proposal, provided that we keep in mind the truth of the Persian proverb, *Neem Hakim Khatra-i-jan* (a half doctor is a danger to life), that is to say, provided we remember that for the new kind of education we envisage, an education which creates fully developed human beings, we have to have teachers trained for their new responsibilities in a new manner. It is possible that a nucleus of this staff can be formed by revising the existing curricula of the Matric-course and later by sending selected scholars to be trained at the most advanced schools in Scandinavia, Russia, Britain and America every year, so that these can, in their turn come back and teach the science and art of teaching in our existing schools and colleges to would-be teachers. But in sending cadres abroad we must keep in mind that not every seminary beyond the seas is capable of giving us instruction in the new ways of teaching. I am inclined to believe that the greater sympathy of women for young children makes women better teachers, and that, therefore, larger numbers of women matriculates ought to be equipped with the training to teach.

The teaching profession will, however, never be popular unless the remuneration of teachers is immediately raised from the shamefully low standard of twenty-five rupees upwards, at which it has been fixed in the past, to a good living wage. In fact no plan of conscription of students to serve as teachers before they graduate, can succeed unless they are paid stipends while they are serving as conscripted student teachers.

Mr. Kodanda Rao's suggestion for mobilising the whole of India's youth to tackle the problem of mass education by accepting conscription, is the only speedy way to get ahead and it is a

great improvement on Sir John Sargent's plans of expanding the present system by opening more special institutions to produce a larger output of teachers at a higher cost, which is never forthcoming from a budget in which education is generally treated as a pretty Cinderella without much practical value.

10

Altogether the shifting of emphasis from the English idea of specialism to a more unbuttoned, more rounded, human outlook is necessary in the present world, for the results of the 19th century division of labour have been to bring about physicists who do not know anything about Chemistry, psychologists who are not supposed to know any Sociology, and intellectuals who are supposed to be above politics, completely above life's struggle, so that the most important thinkers of the world feel impotent in the face of any gangster who can organise evil by a *coup d'état* with the help of the armed forces of a country, and add to his wickedness an open suppression of truth, till he brings about the void of ignorance among the masses, a state on which he can corrode the very basis of human existence.

We in India, with our tradition of the idea made act, cannot allow this betrayal by the intellectual of his functions as a human being. Hitherto, of course, the presence of alien rule has kept the vast mass of our people in the deepest darkness by deliberately refusing us the benefits of free education. But, as we come into our own politically, our responsibilities are inevitably bigger. For mankind is witnessing today the failure of education all over the world to bring about a human civilisation, devoid of beastliness, hatred and fear. Some of us are convinced that we are seeing this disruption, carnage and war around us because the so-called civilised men of Europe chose to thwart and hamper the integral education of children by rules and conventions made in the interests of their Imperial systems. It is the duty of all those who have borne the burden of the useless education imposed on us by these Imperialist masters, and who have now shed it to an extent, to inquire into the grey disease of complacence which possesses us in spite of ourselves. It is incumbent on us to correct our own errors and discard the prejudices which have accrued to us from the past. It is necessary for our very survival, as a part of the human race and as the builders of a new sense of values, for us to

criticise our habit of looking at things mechanically, from the outside. We must seek deeper knowledge of what it is we want to make of our children and what kind of world we want to make of this earth of ours, of our India. We must rescue ourselves from the lumber room of dead sorrows and face our children, so that they are not able to say to us indignantly, as our generation has been saying to our parents: "What kind of a world have you brought us to!" It needs no Jeremiah to tell us today that mankind is threatened by miseries and horrors more terrible than those which Goya painted or Henry Moore ever drew. Have we forgotten that we are capable of splendours as well as miseries?

THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECTUAL IN THE
CONTEMPORARY INDIAN
RENAISSANCE.

To Ali Sardar Jafri,

'Adam, I have given you no fixed abode, no distinctive shape, no special function, because I wish you to be free to choose whatever abode, shape and function you think best. I have set you in the middle of the world to make it easier for you to survey it. I have made you a being neither celestial nor terrestrial, neither mortal nor immortal, so that you may model for yourself, like a sculptor, whatever form you wish. It is in your power to sink to the level of the beasts or to raise yourself up to the divine.'

Pico de la Mirandola

'Verily we proposed to the heavens, and to the earth, and to the mountains to receive the 'trust', but they refused the burden and they feared to receive it. Man undertook to bear it, but hath proved unjust and senseless,'

Qoran, 33:72

If it is true that the first twenty-five or thirty years of the present century have witnessed the most extraordinary awakening of political, social and cultural consciousness in our country, it is also true that they have seen a great deal of muddled thinking and confused feeling, as well as a general decay of values. Therefore, now that the basic problem of political subjection to alien rule has begun to be settled, it becomes incumbent on the intellectuals of India to address themselves to the many incidences of the cultural problems that arise in a new form on the removal of the chief hindrance to our real and integral progress. For, it is only by a criticism of the ideas underlying the revolutionary changes which are occurring in our epoch that we can renew our society and revitalise it, and it is only by continuous discussion of the postulates of this epoch that we can evolve a new set of values for the new life that is opening out before us.

It is likely that the responsibility for this task will fall upon the younger generation of our intellectuals rather than upon the old, for the attitudes of our older leaders seem to have becom

associated not only with many of the perversions which chauvinism engenders but with certain interests which seek to conserve a bourgeois state at a time when that form of polity is already, under the stress of two giant wars, outdated in the modern world. Therefore what I say here, has particular relevance for my contemporaries, and those who are younger than I, rather than for the ossified corpses who will continue to fester among us even after the new free society is already on the way.

But the question arises: 'What do we mean by the responsibility of the intellectual, the writer or the artist, and what is the meaning of freedom for him?'

Let us take the question of the 'responsibility' of the intellectual first.

It is obvious that the question of responsibility does not arise for the intellectual who is avowedly a commercialist writer, one who is venal in his attitude and consciously sets himself against society, and, either from cynicism, bitterness or despair, or from a wanton hatred of life itself, retreats into a contempt for all his fellow men and arouses in them the most perverse emotions and passions.

By implication, therefore, the question of a sense of responsibility arises only before an intellectual who is aware of the need to integrate himself as an individual and as an artist, to the community to which he belongs.

This does not, of course, mean that we should employ narrow, sectarian or priggish considerations and ostracise those intellectuals who have not been able to integrate their artistic urges with the life of society. The struggle to create a high pressure art and to live as a useful member of society is a very difficult one for the artist in a world where the old communities have been breaking up and the new societies have not yet arisen. Apart from this there are many other inherited and environmental, personal idiosyncrasies which stand in the way of such integration. And the complete development of responsible human personality is in itself an ideal which, in Maxim Gorky's phrase, continually recedes before higher and higher approximations. So that we must gratefully accept the gifts of intelligence and creative genius which many of the thinkers and writers of the world are offering up, only relating them to the highest approximations and criticis-

ing them acutely, but without the prejudices which a patronising attitude brings to bear from a puritan contempt for those who have fallen from grace.

Nor does the failure of an intellectual to be a perfectly responsible individual in society warrant us in condemning wholesale a work of art which he might produce. There is the classic example of the reactionary royalist Balzac, who produced some of the most remarkable novels of his time. Then there was Oscar Wilde, condemned to jail for homosexuality by an English court, who wrote some of the finest plays in the English language. And more recently we have had the example of Pound, Montherlant and Celine, who wrote notable books and afterwards turned fascists. While, I think, such rank reactionaries deserve to be tried in a court of law for their treachery, their contribution to literature has to be judged apart, the safest rule in this matter being the Biblical precept: 'By their fruits shall ye judge them.'

'What is the use of prating about the responsibility of the intellectual', I hear someone say, 'if you are going to relax your judgment and excuse these people their complicity in the in-human crimes of fascism? Surely, all their work is tainted, because they have shown themselves to be such immoral men?'

My answer to this question is that in our corrupt society as constituted at present, an individual like Ezra Pound may be adjudged for his complicity in crimes and shot as a quisling, but if any part of his poetry gives us a clue to the milieu in which the writer lived, and of the society and the time which produced him, it may be regarded as important if only for documentary purposes.

The contradiction apparent in the characters and potential talents of these men is one which occurs frequently in our time. And, we can trace it clearly enough to the corrosion of our world by several unfinished revolutions and the disruption of values due to the obfuscating philosophies of the conserving elements of our civilisation. But as the struggle of any responsible individual embraces both the struggle to integrate himself in the community and to re-create himself and his community he has to accept the lesser of the many evils in the contemporary world and, leaving perfectionism aside, accept all those forces which help to realise better and more wholesome conditions in this world.

There is, however, the need for those who think in terms of freedom to exercise the utmost vigilance about all those many intellectuals who are addicted to the game of losing themselves in order to find themselves as an escape from the necessity of action, or those who make romantic gestures, or those who, with a crossword puzzle technique, coin phrases and evolve categories by using words drawn from arbitrary philosophies and thus pose the historic problem of the transformation before us in terms of dilemmas and paradoxes. In fact, one has to keep one's critical apparatus fairly well-sharpened and always by. And, above all, one has always to keep before one the goal of freedom and of ever expanding life, which is the primary source of inspiration for the intelligentsia of our time as well as for the suffering humanity which is coiled in the chains of the profit system.

But, what exactly do we mean by freedom?

In general, freedom to a writer or an artist means the progressive development of human personality in society by the overthrow of all those inhibitions, prohibitions and frustrations which a decadent social system imposes on us; it means, as the poet Aragon puts it, the extension of 'the bounds of the human empire'; it means encouragement of all that helps the life urges of the community against the forces of death which continually assail it; it means the effort to increase the sum of happiness of people of this world.

The question, however, is often asked: 'are we concerned with the happiness of the individual or with the well-being of the whole of society?'

The answer is: with both. For the happiness of the one depends on the other. There can be hardly any chance for an individual to realise the highest potentialities in his nature, if the society of which he is a part remains static, moribund and undemocratic: conversely a new democratic society cannot flourish unless it creates conditions for the emergence of more and more sovereign individuals, of human beings who are able, through reason and action, to control nature and themselves and live a balanced life in the community. To put either the individual or society first and to claim that they are independent of each other is a kind of evasion of the actual life process in the interests of perversity or defeatism.

In this regard it is important to note that those who talk in terms of the salvation of the individual first and foremost do so by pointing out that there is a mysterious reality behind appearance and that reason alone cannot guide us to it or to any worthwhile action, for the instrument of reason, they say, is the source of illusion and error. Therefore, they exalt the perfection of the individual, either by asserting, like Nietzsche, that the absolute power of the will can transform the world, or by appointing renunciation or withdrawal as the highest goal of human endeavour. As they cannot easily achieve this condition, they bemoan their fate and seek vicarious salvation in asceticism, drugs, or despair.

It is obvious that this and many similar philosophies arise during periods of social decay and seek evasions from the grim realities of the workaday world through release from the physical bonds either through death or mystical exaltation. And often they hark back to the past as a kind of utopia and regard everything new as base and ignoble by comparison, hoping to revive the dead and bygone ages as though the embalmed glories of the past can become a splendid future.

But any serious contemplation of the phenomena of nature shows that the fundamental law of the universe is change and that everything is in the process of being altered.

'Now,' said Francis Bacon, 'we can only command nature by obeying her laws.' Ergo, human reason, which is part of the natural process can direct action and help to transform the world by experimenting on phenomena, understanding it and by giving us the necessary power to change it.

This was the method of the arts and sciences which grew up in the wake of the European renaissance, the method of humanism, which put man and his works in the centre of the universe and, through the spirit of adventure and inquiry which came from it, built up the great culture that was to prevail over the whole world.

And I suggest that it has a particular relevance for us in facing the gigantic problems which confront us. For, if we are to rescue ourselves from the degradation to which we had sunk under foreign rule, if we are to cure ourselves of the weaknesses, the ignorances and neglects which came to be associated with us, and if we are to build up this, one of the oldest peoples of the world,

to be one of the youngest peoples in the world, so that it is able to contribute its gifts in the general interchange that is becoming increasingly possible, then we cannot rely any more on the compromises and half measures of the past but have boldly to create plans for the new India and translate them into action.

No one who looks at the present chaos in our society and sees the many inefficient and ludicrous survivals of the past centuries in the midst of the present age, no one who is honest enough to see through the evils of caste and feudal oppression, of fraudulent religious and tawdry complacency, and of the misuse of Truth and Love as empty figures of speech, can resist the conclusion that only great upheavals and vast overturnings can really restore dignity to human personality and create a civilised society among us.

There is needed, therefore, not only a poultice to cure our headaches, but a social revolution of a far reaching character, with an accompanying cultural renaissance that may create the new life. In fact, it is not only a revolution and a renaissance that is necessary, but it must be further accompanied by a reformation which sweeps aside the putrescent rubbish of false doctrines and their corrupt practitioners, before we can escape from the despondency which afflicts us.

Such a renaissance and reformation cannot, however, mature except through the widest possible dissemination of knowledge to the people who are the ultimate sanction for all these changes and without that knowledge being informed by the love of freedom and the desire to live in amity with other peoples. And as the task of education can only be carried out by the new kind of men who understand the implications of the age in which we live, and who know how to transform it, there is required a new leadership of the people themselves, and their allies among the existing intelligentsia, who alone can carry out the revolutionary changes which are incipient in the profit system and build a free, equitable and just society.

What are the actual and concrete values which we must immediately create to save the sinking ship?

Obviously, the first and foremost value is the recognition of the dignity of man as such, that each human personality and his

needs are important. And in a time of protracted famine, food is the first need. Similarly cloth is the second elementary necessity. And water, which is the source of life. And air, both the physical and the spiritual air which we breathe, must be cleaned, purified, and freed from the poisons which the mendacity of evil men has injected into it. In short, we must have all the freedoms that our rulers glibly promise but actually withhold from us.

We will find that, in and through the struggle to achieve these values themselves, we will be building up a political regime which is more democratic, an economic system which will be comprehensive and which will habituate our peasantry to work with modern techniques, that we will be busying our artisans, engineers and architects with the task of building giant hydro-electric works, that we will be asking our people and technicians to talk to each other on the radio and through the films, that we will be busying the journalists with the maintenance of our civil liberties and the writers and artists with the imaginative creations which may interpret the longings and desires of one human soul to another. The energies of our people will thus be directed into channels which will mould the sacred earth itself into the shape of those visions with which religion has in the past lulled us to believe in another world. And, altogether, there will arise that atmosphere where, the more primitive struggles over, men can dedicate themselves to exploring the subtler laws of the Universe and conquering all forms of death.

It becomes incumbent on the intellectuals, therefore, to join together with all other members of the intelligentsia who are in their own particular way carrying on the struggle for the new life against dead habits, feudal and alien oppression, ignorance and superstition. And, declaring an uncompromising and irrevocable fight for the real political, economic and cultural freedom, particularly the fight for truth against falsehood, we must choose, select and discriminate between the real values as against the tinsel charms of merely clever bon-mots and wisecracks. And we must thus create a philosophy of life which exalts man, inspires him with the strength courageously to face the conserving interests and to evoke an atmosphere of joy and hope necessary for the preservation of life and for the creation of more life on earth.